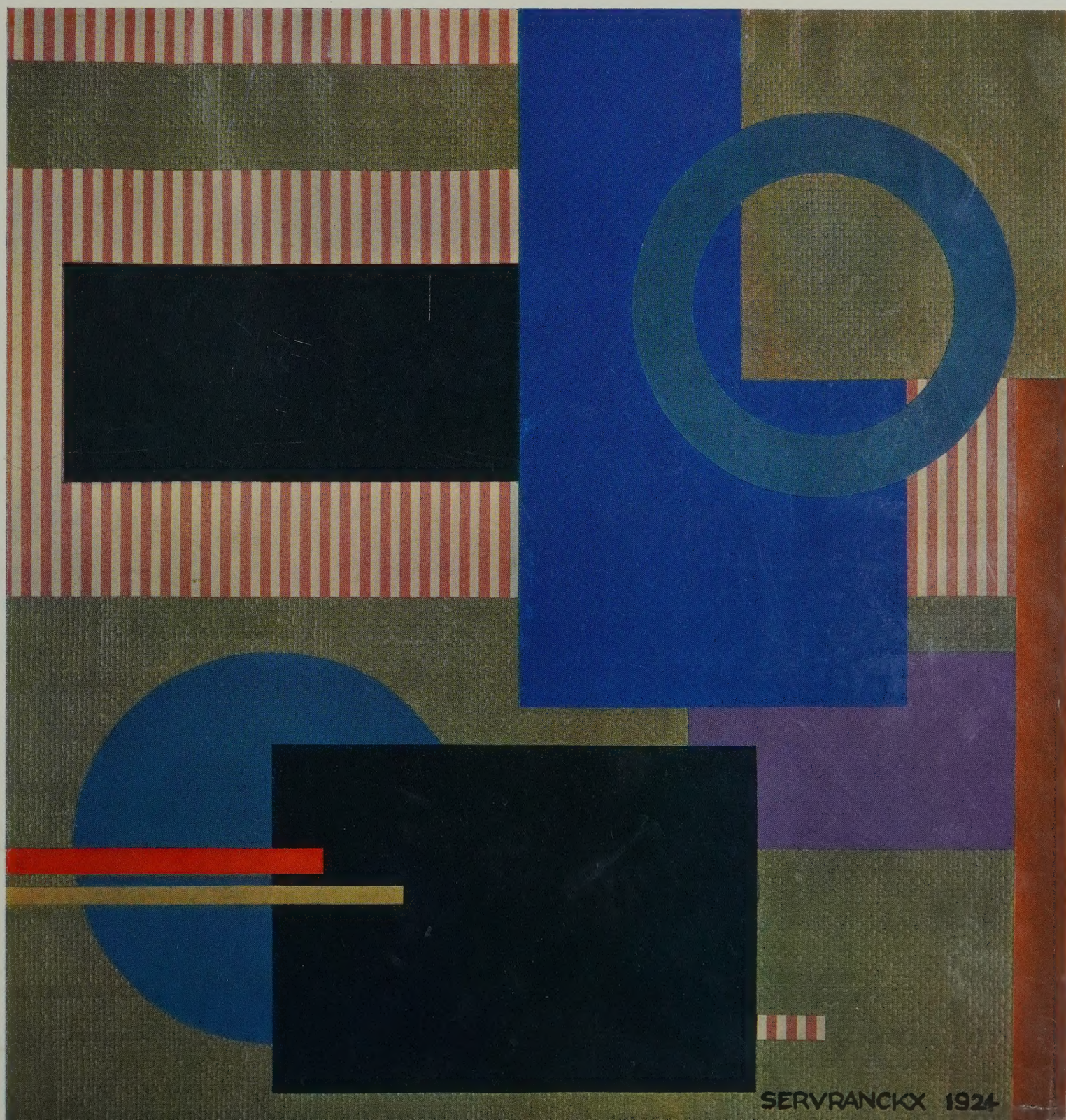


# ABSTRACT PAINTING IN FLANDERS

FONDS MERCATOR S.A.

MICHEL  
SEUPHOR



2d Edition

SERVANCKX 1924







WIMBLEDON SCHOOL OF ART  
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Abstract painting in Flanders

Wimbledon School of Art



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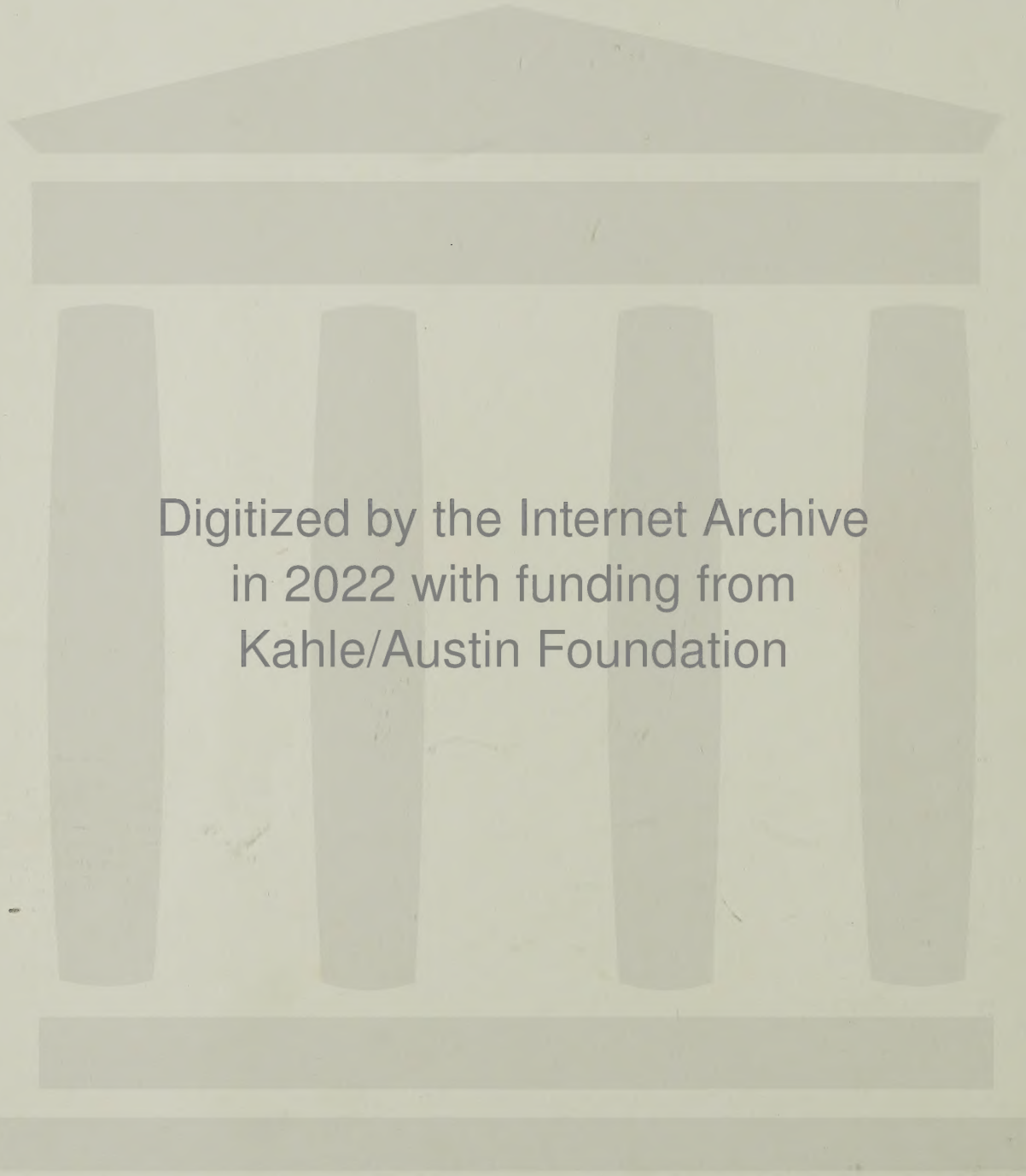


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**ABSTRACT PAINTING IN FLANDERS**



# ABSTRACT



✓  
**MICHEL SEUPHOR**

# **PAINTING IN FLANDERS**

WITH THE COLLABORATION OF

**MAURITS BILCKE**

**LÉON-LOUIS SOSSET**

**JAN WALRAVENS**

FOREWORD BY

**ÉMILE LANGUI**



SOME OF THE WORKS  
OF MICHEL SEUPHOR :

Carnet bric-à-brac (Antwerp, 1924).  
— *Diaphragme intérieur et un drapeau*  
(Paris, 1926). — *Lecture élémentaire*  
(Paris, 1928). — *Greco* (Paris, 1931). —  
*Un renouveau de la peinture en Belgique*  
*flamande* (Paris, 1932). — *Dans le royaume*  
*du cœur* (Paris, 1935). — *Pro justo*  
(Paris, 1939). — *Les Evasions d'Olivier*  
*Trickmansholm* (Paris, 1939). — *Douce*  
*Province* (Lausanne, 1941). — *La Maison*  
*claire* (Lyons, 1943). — *Tout dire* (Paris,  
1945). — *Le Visage de Senlis* (Paris,  
1947). — *L'Art abstrait, ses origines, ses*  
*premiers maîtres* (Paris, 1949). — *Piet*  
*Mondrian, sa vie, son œuvre* (Paris, New  
York, Cologne, Milan, 1956). — *Diction-*  
*naire de la peinture abstraite* (Paris, Mu-  
nich, London, New York, 1957). — *La*  
*Sculpture de ce siècle* (Neuchâtel, Colo-  
gne, London, New York, 1959). — *La*  
*Peinture abstraite, sa genèse, son expan-*  
*sion* (Paris, Munich, Milan, Barcelona,  
New York, 1962).





1.

This pastel drawing by Henry Van de Velde, entitled by him « Abstraction » and performed about 1893 (Rijksmuseum Kröller-Müller, Otterlo, size 47 x 49) holds here the out-post place that suits it. It is a way for us to render homage to the painter's memory, to the great pioneer of architecture, to the clear-seeing man who wished that art would be considered as a « living organism ». Could this wish be true for this book ! Be he a part of life implanted in life ! Be all mummification for ever missing in it, even in the mind of those who would read it within twenty years !







## FOREWORD

*The history of art — thank Heaven — does not come within the province of the positive sciences. It is made up of a subtle mixture of facts and suppositions, of documents and hypotheses, of knowledge and of intuition. It rests, to be sure, on a good number of positive, verifiable and verified data, but these never go to the heart of the matter, for the problem belongs essentially to the realm of the emotions and eludes all definition and all analysis. I can well imagine a masterpiece, perfect from every point of view, as to which nothing, absolutely nothing, is known. It would fall outside the history of art, which I see as not unlike the pyramid of marble and of clouds imagined by René Magritte.*

*Because of this, it can and must at all times revise its most final judgments. It does not thereby contradict itself, for it rests on the imponderables of human culture, whose evolution it traces. Every generation, as it becomes aware of its own existence in relation with the world and the time, must also define its position with respect to art. Every age reinvents its history and rewrites it with the same faith and the same good faith as the preceding generations.*

*The history of contemporary art, more than any other, is written in this spirit, so true it is that the sons are interested above all in the wonderful history of a certain art — the one, precisely, which their fathers have neither understood nor loved; which must not surprise us when we know that innovators are always thirty to forty years ahead of their time.*

*Ours is no less subject than any other to this law of evolution. Quite the contrary. Never, except in the time of the humanists of the sixteenth century, has the revision of the most sacred values been so radical, so pitiless as today. And, even though full justice has not been done, the enrichment of our imaginary museum has spectacularly increased.*

*Belgium can boast a vast literature devoted to its plastic arts from James Ensor to the present day. Most of these works are good, some are even excellent and two or three have become classics of modern art, even though their conclusions can already be challenged.*

*Nevertheless one fact is obvious: it is that nearly all the historians, critics and literary writers who have dealt with the art of the twentieth century have given*

but slight attention to the Belgian contribution to the growth and flowering of abstract art. The few monographs, sporadically published, are generally reliable, but they are very recent and taken together do not provide a synthetic view. The work we have the honor of presenting to the reader, which is the latest of a series of basic publications edited at the behest of the Banque de Paris et des Pays-Bas (1), will fill this regrettable gap.

Yet it is not too soon to ask ourselves to what combination of circumstances we should attribute a gap which appears to us as unjust as it is inexplicable. No one need plead guilty, but the denial or the failure of recognition of so fundamental a phenomenon of the art of our time requires an explanation. Such an explanation is particularly indispensable for the period of 1920 to 1940; for the break through of 1950, fortunately, was achieved in an infinitely more favorable climate.

The severest handicap for the pioneers of abstract art in Flanders was unquestionably the bitter battle waged over Expressionism immediately after the First World War. This style, so fundamentally Flemish, had to be consolidated immediately — so the militants felt — for on this victory all others depended. There were troops which were sacrificed. The Expressionist campaign, aggressive, bold and exclusive — as much so as the Futurist revolt had been at its height — mobilized all energies and left the leaders with neither the desire nor the time to open a "second front". Meanwhile the abstractionists, gathering in small coteries, and defended by reviews which were courageous but, alas, confidential, worked in a more and more marked isolation. The two phalanxes, the expressionist and the

abstract, despite their divergencies, waged the battle side by side against a common adversary. Many are the artists who fought under both flags. The avant-garde reviews defended and sang the glories of both. And yet the men of Selection and of Le Centaure continue to be reproached for their systematic disavowal of the abstractionists, whom they are presumed to have neglected through their love of the artists of Laethem-Saint-Martin. This is a tedious yarn, but one which is repeated to satiety in some quarters.

A good many of the avant-garde leaders of the years 1920-30 who did not believe in the Belgian abstractionists of the heroic period continue to claim that these at no time achieved international recognition and that their reputation at the time was no more than a succès d'estime. Michel Seuphor, in the body of the present work, explains why he and his brothers-at-arms will have none of this kind of tribute in reverse. So much for what may still persist of this legend. The events of the past ten years have proved that the sceptics of yesteryear not only underestimated the pioneers of their period, but purely and simply ignored some of the best among them, in particular the delightful Lacasse. If it be true that, on the European level, recognition came late, their success is nevertheless based on undeniable qualities which too often escaped the most perspicacious contemporaries.

A second fact to be remembered in order to explain the belated success of the first group of abstractionists is the defeatism that prevailed at the most critical moment and often drove the best to discouragement, to surrender, even to desertion. At a certain time the panic was such that the entire movement seemed liquidated for good and all. The reader will find in this book the reasons for which some abandoned painting for several years, others went over, bag and baggage, to expressionism, and still others did not resist the siren call of surrealism.

Far be it from us to cast a stone at any of the pioneers, but this kind of collective collapse, before 1930, was for abstract art in Belgium a far harder blow than the crash that struck the expressionists between 1929 and 1931. It was in fact only twenty years later that the abstractionists succeeded in overcoming the crisis, and they did so thanks to the acquisition of new blood and to the broadening of the range of styles. I am thinking in particular of the vogue enjoyed by lyrical

(1) Works already published : in 1956, by Frans Masereel, « My Country », album of hundred woodcuts by the author. De luxe edition not available to the trade. — In 1957, by Carlo Bronne, « The Mirror of Belgium », an anthology grouping various judgements on our Country by foreign artists. De luxe edition not available to the trade. — In 1958, by J. Delaissé, « Medieval Miniatures », grouping the reproductions of fifty of the finest miniatures lodged with the Bibliothèque Royale de Belgique. Published by Editions de la Connaissance, Brussels, in four languages. — In 1959, by Paul Haesaerts, « History of Modern Flemish Painting », Edit. Arcade, Brussels. — In 1959, by Walther Vanbeselaere, « Modern Flemish Painting », from Leys to Permeke, Edit. Arcade, Brussels. — In 1960, by Roger-A. d'Hulst, « Flemish Mural Decoration from the XIVth to XVIIIth Century » and its French and German translations, Edit. Arcade, Brussels. — In 1961, by G. Faider, S. Collon-Gevaert, J. Lejeune and J. Stiennon, « Mosan Art in the XIth, XIIth and XIIIth centuries », and its Dutch and German translations, Edit. Arcade, Brussels. — In 1962, by Roger Avermaete, « Rik Wouters » and its Dutch translation, Edit. Arcade, Brussels.



abstraction, that particularly dynamic mode of expression which was unknown to the generation of the precursors.

In speaking of lyricism, we touch upon the third phenomenon which, in our opinion, impeded an immediate spread of non-figurative art in Flanders. This art, in its beginnings, was too much a style — in the sense that Seuphor gives to this term and which corresponds fairly well to the formula of the Dutch group *De Stijl* — that is, too exclusively subject to the imperatives of order, of balance, of restraint, of harmony and of purity... and this at a period and among a people — after the war of 1914-1918 — which were only too much given to instinct, to intuition, to the Dionysian cry, to the lyrical gesture and to the impulsive arabesque. Michel Seuphor who was one of the first to define authoritatively the two tendencies of abstract art — the style and the cry — will explain why, in Belgium, from the beginning, the Mondrian current prevailed over the Kandinsky current, whereas all the symptoms would have led one to anticipate the contrary. The Flemish abstract painters, having for the most part sprung from futurism (rather than from cubism) seem to have expurgated Marinetti's movement of all its vitality, of all its dynamism, of its spontaneity. They dedicated themselves body and soul to the geometric style which is but the quintessence of analytical cubism. Even the machinism of Servranckx — an artist who, in other respects, overflows with lyricism — obeys the axiom formulated by Braque: rule corrects emotion.

For the reasons set forth above and for many others, Belgian abstract art, as a collective and coordinated movement, was thoroughly paralyzed well before the Second World Conflagration. Such being the case, the isolation of the artists under the enemy occupation, the confusion that had come over the best spirits, the propaganda for an art of Blut und Boden and a whole climate of defeatism only deepened the chasm between figurative and abstract art. Things were pushed too far for the reaction not to manifest itself immediately upon the Liberation, with unexampled violence. In less than ten years it was to bring about the victory of the other camp.

The whole generation born between 1910 and 1920 had marked time indecisively before the dilemma,

which was both a moral and a stylistic one: whether to cling for all eternity to the little sensation or to start again from zero, as the youth of the world from which they had been cut off for five years were doing. The group of artists in question included a good number of excellent colorists who, in those days of obscurantism, were languishing in an atmosphere of anaemic intimism for which Paul Haesaerts has tried to find an appropriate label. The painters who could not be poured into this mold drifted on the confines of surrealism and expressionism. No one painted abstract, and the youngest of them all was still Servranckx.

It was in May-June of 1945 exactly that the first great post-war exhibition of Young French Painting, at the Palace of Fine Arts of Brussels, brought about the break, challenged everything, form, color, as well as the spirit, and opened several windows on the future. Essentially, nothing more was discovered than some half-cleared trails abandoned twenty-five years before. And yet the Brussels exhibition was anything but a manifestation of non-figurative art. But the manner in which Manessier, Singier, Gischia, Tal Coat and others approached the eternal plastic problem suddenly and imperiously brought back into honor the styles of Mondrian, Kandinsky, Malevitch, Herbin, Moholy-Nagy, Léger, Roger de la Fresnaye, Marc, Macke, Delaunay, Picabia, Schwitters and Klee. Simultaneously, we became aware of the worth of that sacrificed generation which is the generation of Peeters, Joostens, Lacasse, Vantongerloo, Servranckx, Flouquet, De Boeck and others.

With all these examples before their eyes, the young members of the *Apport* or the *Jeune Peinture Belge* group slowly evolved in the direction of abstraction. Each one of them, according to his personality, sought an individual solution to the general problem. It took several years for the process of detachment, of decantation and of maturation to be accomplished. No really ripe abstract work came out of the new studios before 1950, but the five years sacrificed, in misery and in joy, in dejection and in hope, to the renewal of the arts in Belgium must be reckoned among the finest, and the youngest, of this half century.

This second generation, freed of any inferiority complex before the academicians, succeeded, after a period of hesitant searching and gratuitous experiments, in forging for itself a solid style whose vocabul-

ary of images includes the most exuberant lyricism as well as the most serene meditation. This time, non-formal painting, action painting, tachisme and the use of crude materials enable the instinctive artists to give free rein to their passionate intuitions. These last descendants of the Flemish baroque express themselves in broad spontaneous gestures and in violently variegated arabesques.

Alongside the lyrical abstractionists — not opposite them — stand those who subject emotion to a certain discipline of reason. They exclude from their art every element of disturbance, of agitation, of disequilibrium and of impurity. These devotees of geometric abstraction are moralists, professing the worship of restraint, of clarity and of immutable beauty. They are, to use a Nietzschean term, Apollonian and consequently classical artists.

In both tendencies, the Dionysian and the Apollonian, Belgian abstract art can boast a good number of eminent artists whose renown has long since extended beyond our frontiers.

The promoter of this book has invited Michel Seuphor to write its general introduction. This task rightly fell to the distinguished son of Antwerp, writer, painter, draftsman and art historian, who in his sixties has kept all the faith and all the combativeness that he showed in his twenties. He was barely out of his adolescence when, immediately after the First World War, he proved himself to be one of the most courageous and enlightened defenders of the whole artistic avant-garde in Flanders, in the literary field as well as in that of architecture, painting and the applied arts. His review *Het Overzicht* (1) — which he launched in 1921 — was already dedicated to abstract art and — he himself played in Belgium the role of theoretician which Theo van Doesburg held with such authority in Holland.

He had kept the ideal of his youth intact when, later, in absolute destitution and having lost many illusions, he expatriated himself to Paris. There, in his articles, his essays and his books, he has followed, analyzed and criticized, even to their finest shades, all the manifestations of abstract art, for more than thirty years. He has subjected men and works to the severest criteria, and finally has made a synthesis of his ideas and his judgments in authoritative works about abstract

painting. He who, in the heart of the battle, was able to discern the value of the multitude of national contributions to the universal effort, is the man wholly indicated to speak to us of the most modern creations both in Flanders and in the Walloon provinces. The esteem he enjoys in international circles is a guarantee of his objectivity and his integrity.

The promoter of this book entrusted him, besides, with choosing three collaborators among the day-to-day renowned commentators on artistic life in Belgium. The choice quite naturally fell on Maurits Bilcke, Léon-Louis Sosset and Jan Walravens, three of the best art critics in Belgium. Won over from the beginning to the cause of abstract art, they are fired with an enthusiasm based on a thorough knowledge of the subject. They have each collected the biographical data on a series of artists, classified their outstanding works and formulated a synthetic criticism of the value and significance of each painter individually.

Their texts follow Michel Seuphor's. Their notices are arranged in chronological order based on the painters' birth dates; they are not signed. The reader will find at the end of the book a table of contents mentioning, beside the name of the authors, the list of the artists treated by each of them.

The four writers have met as a group periodically for about two years, in order to determine in common the scope of the work and to prepare the text. Mrs. Gonnissen has effectively seconded them by assuming the delicate task of secretary. Once the documentation had been fully assembled, the team had to determine with a maximum of objectivity and equity the respective importance of the artists concerned. This inevitably gave rise to many controversies, especially when the art of the young was at issue. Nonetheless all divergencies were smoothed out in a spirit of brotherly frankness. Aside from this, the date of publication of the work has imposed upon the authors more than one compromise, among others on the number of reproductions to assign to each painter and on the length of the text, comment or simple mention to devote to him. But it was decided at the outset that each co-author, after having compared his views with those of the team, would retain full freedom in his appraisals. Because of this certain deviations, certain contradictions even, were inevitable; may they contribute to the variety and to the richness of a work which is, above all, a



group undertaking! The promotor and the writer of the preface wish to pay tribute to the seriousness and the devotion with which the authors have carried through an undertaking which at every turn had to prejudice the future.

The whole team is conscious of the fact that the work will give rise to a good deal of criticism, not only from adversaries of abstract art, but also from its initiates and admirers. This follows from the very nature of a book which is first of all a document of the present time, drawn up by writers who day after day are engaged in the shifting struggle for an other art. Michel Seuphor's texts in particular are likely to give rise to certain polemics. Some, while paying tribute to the integrity and the talent of the writer chiefly responsible for the book, will probably reproach him for an excess of severity, even for being almost unfair to a few artists of his country. It should be said, however, in the interest of objectivity, that Seuphor does not attack persons but ideas, works and theories. The essential, for him as for us, is to serve the cause of art without fear or favor (1). What we have all tried to do, through this book and beyond it, is to penetrate one of the most remarkable spiritual phenomena of our century. Our undertaking has meaning only to the extent to which it gives rise to a constructive discussion which will bring us closer to truth.

We trust the title will not be thought to be misleading. The work might have been entitled *Abstract Art in Belgium*, because it included the abstract painters of the Walloon provinces who during the past ten to twelve years have, alongside of their Flemish fellow-artists, displayed brilliant qualities of temperament, imagination, style and coloration. For the reasons set forth by Michel Seuphor, it was thought preferable to formulate

(1) Michel Seuphor is not only a writer; he is also a painter and a draftsman. As such, he has unquestionably contributed to the development of one of the most refined forms of constructed abstract art. His painting and his graphic work reflect his whole personality and are steeped in the same spiritual climate as his writings. The three co-authors and the promotor came to the decision that his art — scattered through Europe and the Americas — ought to be represented in our book, despite the fact that the artist is its author. It was against the latter's wishes that Maurits Blicke was invited to write the comment on Seuphor's art.

the title in such a way that the book — which is to appear simultaneously in four languages — should link the art of today to the illustrious tradition of Flemish painting. For that matter, all the Walloon painters whose works are reproduced here have signified their agreement on this point.

The title plate reproduces a pastel entitled *Abstraction* (Kröller-Müller Rijksmuseum, Otterlo), executed about 1898 by the Belgian Henry Van de Velde, the venerable precursor of the new art and the founder of this new aesthetics with which we are still wholly imbued. Let us hope that the Banque de Paris et des Pays-Bas some day undertake to publish a fine volume dedicated to the fame of this great European.

Another reproduction at the beginning of this work might surprise the reader. This is a canvas by Constant Permeke, *La Baignade* (Alexis Finck collection, Brussels), in which the great Flemish expressionist, without in the least imagining that he was creating a "non-figurative" work — like Turner at his best moments — breaks away so completely from the visual sensation that he masterfully attains the most poetic regions of lyrical abstraction, where painting joins music.

In order to add a special lustre to this book the promotor has asked the authors to make a selection of paintings and drawings to be reproduced, one hundred and thirty in color and thirty-eight in black and white. To the extent to which the most important of these works were still available and not held by museums and private collections, they have been acquired, from the artists, by a group of friends of the Banque de Paris et des Pays-Bas. The collection thus constituted comes close to forming a representative body of abstract art in Flanders. It is planned to have this collection tour the world in the form of a traveling exhibition, of which the book will be in a sense the guide and the catalogue. We hope, needless to say, that this undertaking will be an outstanding success and we thank in advance the artists, the curators of museums, the collectors and the art lovers for their valuable collaboration in the realization of a project which, to say the least, boldly breaks away from the beaten track.

Emile LANGUI





PART ONE

ABSTRACT PAINTING  
IN FLANDERS

BY

MICHEL SEUPHOR



2

Constant PERMEKE  
Bathing, about 1917  
75 x 60, oil on linen.  
Finck collection, Brussels.



## I. - REMARKS ON ABSTRACT ART IN GENERAL

SOME THIRTY YEARS AGO, whenever I happened to stop over in Brussels, the newspapers and the people I met spoke of nothing but the *North-South junction*. They were referring, of course, to the two big railway stations in the city, between which a rail connection was considered by all to be on the one hand necessary and on the other almost impossible to achieve. The junction has now been effected, and it is hard to imagine that it was ever otherwise. Can it be that problems which are apparently insoluble wear down, as a result of being manipulated, to the point where the *impossible* vanishes? Sometimes it is only necessary for a small wheel in the complex mechanism of obstacles to rust and break, and the entire context is suddenly changed. Then all that remains of the confused ocean of gambles and objections, of an atmosphere of risks and quarrels, is the glass of clear water that quenches the builders' thirst.

Today it is the relations between East and West that most acutely concern mankind and that make the organization of the world of tomorrow seem as formidable as the squaring of the circle. Yet this too will be accomplished through the force of circumstances, or more precisely by the natural growth of peoples, which itself is impelled by economic imperatives, and here too it is possible to prophesy, without being a prophet, that the perfect mechanism of impediments, oiled daily by expert hands, will become obsolete and that the insurmountable obstacles to this other *junction* will appear as laughable to our grand-nephews as those which opposed the linking of the two Brussels stations for so many years.

"The time of the finished world is beginning", according to Valéry. This epitome implies the idea that the growing pains of our race are coming to an end. Perhaps the Hiroshima bomb, putting an end to the second

world war, was the first signal of this maturity. The world, at last conscious of its sphericity, of its exiguity — as a result of the frequency and the wholly new speed of exchanges — will belong to men rather than to nations. It will very soon give rise to universal man. For forty years technics and the arts have been at work on this. The airplane and abstract art have carried around the globe an identical style, an identical human behavior. Never was the Biblical phrase to the effect that earth is "in travail" more apt.

The airplane and abstract art. Both born at the beginning of this century, they are indeed its children who, having become adult and their own masters, give it its specific character : that of inner necessity, to speak like Kandinsky, and that of outer necessity, to speak like the technician. The vastness of economic and travel exchanges has transformed the outer aspect of life to such a point that any man of sixty, if he remembers his childhood, can say today that he has known another world.

It was in that other world that abstract art came into being at the time when Blériot was crossing the Channel, an exploit as considerable in 1909 as the present circling of the globe by astronauts. Our century travels fast. At times we have the impression that it is running away with itself and we get dizzy. Then we suffer from an attack of antimachinism and we dream of going back to the horse-and-buggy days, which is practically prehistory. For the distance is less great, in terms of subjective time, between the *Giza Sphinx* and Rodin's *The Thinker* than between two not even extreme dates in our own century, let us say 1910 and 1960. Fifty years and two wars have changed the world of nations into the "earth of men".

Our nostalgia for the "good old days", which are real only in our imagination, does not long resist the encroachment of the technical elements of modern life which we are constantly using even as we dream, and whose sudden absence we should find terribly upsetting. We belong to our age, and whatever shafts of criticism we may direct at it, we could belong to no other. It is therefore quite natural that we should be receptive to an art which has so many affinities with this age of ours, which envelops us, and penetrates us.

To the question "what is abstract art ?" it would therefore suffice to answer : it is the art which coincides

with our period. But our period is multiple in itself, it has powerful attachments to the past. The influence of traditions, of inherent survivals, makes it infinitely complex. Without taking into account that often we are not averse to turning back with a thousand artifices for the sheer pleasure of novelty. These things are in fact necessary, for without them we should miss the stimulus of contrasts.

Abstract art has been defined, and in many ways. I shall not revert to the definitions I myself have formulated in other books, for it seems to me that there is none simpler or more startling than van Gogh's when he expressed the wish that art should be "something consoling like a piece of music". van Gogh, who clung to the description of nature, whether lyrical or expressive, was very far from abstraction when he wrote this sentence, and perhaps, had he lived, he would have needed another twenty years of experience finally to come to it, once the time was ripe. But are the finest ideas not premonitions, I mean projections into the void which do not know "how much too far they go" ?

Like a piece of music. For two centuries concert music has delighted our ears without our ever asking, "What does it mean ?" Why can painting not delight our eyes without our asking "What does it represent ?" The only answer I can find is our illogical and contradictory nature.

Or are we to believe that our eye is less sensitive than our ear ? Yet people go into ecstasies over a fireworks display which projects into space a wholly gratuitous chord of bright colors. They like fine flowerbeds, cover long distances to go and admire fields of tulips. But if a painter does the same thing on a canvas, these same people cry shame and accuse him of perpetrating a hoax. And when I say this I am not thinking only of people "who don't know better". More than half a century after the first abstract canvases were painted, a highly reputed journalist was not above writing in a Paris newspaper, in September 1961, that this art is nothing but "sterile revery" and "vain destruction". It took impressionism forty years to win over the public at large. It will take twenty more for certain intellectuals, too strongly attached to the exclusive loves of their youth, to realize that the century of impressionism has been succeeded by the century of abstract art. His-



tory moves forward, and the immobile sensors of a former time still speak, judge and hand down pronouncements by their old standards, when they have long been outdistanced, isolated, submerged by the rising tides of life.

THE ADVENT OF THE MACHINE was the great novelty of the years that preceeded the first world war. Even though this motherless daughter, as Picabia was to call it a little later, was everywhere to be seen, it took some audacity to integrate it into the traditional arts. Marinetti it was who gave the first signal for this when he published an Ode to his racing car, in a collection of poems, in 1908. This magnificent bravura piece — so unmechanical, incidentally, and still full of symbolist afflatus — has been often quoted :

Vehement God of a race of steel,  
Space-intoxicated automobile  
stamping with anguish, the bit between your  
[strident teeth !  
Oh formidable Japanese monster with forge eyes,  
feeding on flame and mineral oils,  
thirsty for horizons and sidereal preys...

The following year, in the first Futurist Manifesto, the same automobile is declared to be "more beautiful than the Victory of Samothrace" and the world is called upon to learn that it has been enriched by a new beauty : speed. But, even as the above-quoted poem ends with an ascent to a heaven "dripping with stars", the Manifesto ends with a "challenge to the stars" which inevitably recalls the final words of the third and last part of the *Divine Comedy*. "*Salire alle stelle !*" How alike the cries of Dante and Marinetti are ! The comparison will surprise only those who believe that the inauguration of new gods must mean a total break with previous values. This is far from being the case, and the most violent calls to revolution have no effect on the inner workings of the mind, gorged as it is with unconscious survivals which themselves will be creative of values in the body of the new data.

The spirit of futurism, as Marinetti molded it, was to remain from beginning to end profoundly romantic.

How many verbal formulae, which are meant to be cold and cutting, are belied by the tone in which they are uttered ! There is never a sharp break in human affairs, and the present one, more directed to the "future" than any other, undergoes, as does each one of us, the reflexes of the irrepressible past.

No one, in other words, is wholly what he would wish to be and every human being is a complex world which gives rise to its own contradiction. This contradiction is particularly sharp in the case of futurism, which was at one and the same time nationalistic, that is, revolutionary, and universalistic, wanting to glorify both mechanical technics and the dream, which was to proclaim "contempt for woman" and the frenzied cult of carnal pleasures. But all these antinomies are wrapped in a lyricism so powerful that they are nearly canceled by it. It is not the words that count here, but the convincing force of the one who utters them. The communicative warmth of these manifestoes is such that it was impossible not to be affected by them. All Europe heard the futurist clamor, and the laughter of the bourgeois, the shrug of the intellectuals did not prevent this truth from asserting itself. And the truth of futurism was the new life brought by the machine. Marinetti's dynamism was itself the machine of this new awareness.

AT THE VERY MOMENT when the Futurist Manifesto appeared in the *Figaro*, Braque, Picasso, Dufy and Pica-bia were painting elementary landscapes which are very close to abstraction, although they are in the line of succession of Cézanne, whose last investigations they seemed to want to summarize in an abridged form. This is how the road to cubism was prepared. We here touch upon a quite different spirit, whose more deliberate movement was to be as far-reaching as futurism. For several years it pursued a parallel path, sometimes so close that learned exegetists still discuss the osmosis of the two movements and their mutual influence.

They are in fact very different. To begin with, cubism did not spring from the imagination of an inspired poet; it is the result of a unique evolution of painting. It was the attraction of Negro art that introduced the angular style, visible for the first time in Picasso's famous

*Demoiselles d'Avignon*, finished or left as it was in 1907. Thereupon the movement pursued its course, accentuating its techniques. Soon mandolines, jam-pots, drinking glasses, nudes, harlequins, portraits and pedestal tables adopted the angular style, a pitiless fractioning and discreet coloring, verging on gray. And the perspective of history reveals to us paradoxically that futurism, a painting of the imagination, involuntarily paved the way for surrealism and the figurative reaction, whereas the physics of the cubist paintings reflected the spirit of machinism quite differently, but how much more effectively than futurism which exalted it.

If African art — its expressive sobriety, its natural straight-forwardness — informed the cubists, it was the ochre and gray cubism which informed Mondrian. Several paintings of the museums of Holland and America bear the obvious marks of this. But what was to continue to remain figure or still life in Braque and Picasso, despite the temptations of abstraction which the brush at times accepted and which the spirit refused, quickly became, in Mondrian's case, a pure orchestration of line and color. Moreover, the beveled sectioning of the cubists became gradually transformed, in his case, into a horizontal-vertical structure, expressed by a multitude of short and long strokes. What we have is something like fugues or variations on a very simple theme meant for silent contemplation.

Whatever Apollinaire may have said about the Dutch painter's "very special cubism", what Mondrian derives from cubism becomes something quite different from cubism; we witness here the birth of a new art. Almost at the same time the same phenomenon of mutation occurred in Munich, where Kandinsky was deriving from expressionism something quite different from expressionism: the art of pure effusion.

Who suspected at the time that what was happening in Paris and in Munich would become the foundation for the painting of this century? For the observers of the time it was an art adventure a little more far reaching than cubism or futurism. But those who look at things a little more closely by reading Kandinsky's book, *Ueber das Geistige in der Kunst* or Mondrian's first essays in *De Stijl*, will quickly realize that these arts have been carefully thought out and that nothing is farther removed from the spirit of the two painters than audac-

ity for the sake of audacity or the intention to mystify anyone.

It is no less remarkable to find that even in these first hours of so-called abstract painting, we are in the presence of the two extreme poles of art which, in 1962, remain uncrossed. More than thirty years ago I characterized them by the terms *style* and *cry*.

"Alles ist erlaubt" (All is permitted), Kandinsky wrote in *Der Blaue Reiter*. By no means, Mondrian was to retort: great art is in the limitation of the means to the essential elements of painting. By this he meant the three fundamental colors used in rigorously flat and orthogonal planes, the lines being always parallel to the edges of the frame. Thus *all* and *almost nothing* meet face to face. But Kandinsky was soon to perceive that this "all" was strangely limiting. An effusion resembles an effusion as a cry resembles a cry. But the voice that sings knows a thousand variations which build and modulate the song. And so, after 1921, the great Russian painter had recourse to a sober geometry and his work, while it became less violent, opened to an infinitely more varied expression. Some have attributed this sudden about-turn to Malevitch's influence, which is perhaps debatable. It is true that Malevitch had exhibited in Moscow a perfect square as well as other simple geometric elements and published, in 1915, a Manifesto on cubo-futurism which reveals a rare clairvoyance. But Malevitch, great pioneer of geometrical abstraction though he is, never manifested in his own art either Mondrian's capacity for restraint nor Kandinsky's well-nigh inexhaustible inventiveness.

Between the latter's ardor (the *Blaue Reiter* period) and Mondrian's elementary structure there was a vast field in which several painters, among whom Robert Delaunay is the most significant, at once took their place. In his canvases of the period before 1914, Delaunay delighted in making the colors sing all together, all of them in their pure state. But he never abandoned restraint, clear rhythm. A deep, calm joy is expressed in his works with a very marked tendency to circular rhythms, a transcription of the solar movement, in total contrast to Mondrian's straight angle.

Such, very sketchily, is the background against which abstract art was to evolve from this point on. A style of great nobility, reserved, ascetic, contrasts with the powerful cry of direct expression; between the two,



the measured lyricism of pure sensibility. In forty years nothing essential has been added to those first fruits of the heroic age. Many who saw those works at the time regarded them as studio pastimes not meant to last, minor news items in the chronicle of the arts. That there may have been cases of leg-pulling and of over-estimation is of course possible, but fate has taken matters into its own hands and a new outlook has transfigured fragile experiments. These works which might so easily not have come into being are now precious museum pieces and the stories attached to them have become history.

WHAT ARE THE NEW VALUES that painters have discovered through the achievement of the first works of abstract art? What do they seek? What is involved is nothing less than the conquest of art itself. A kind of essence which subsists when the art of painting is stripped of the anecdote, of the object, even of the pretext taken from tangible reality. This remnant will retain no relationship with the objects and the facts of everyday life, nor with memory, nor with history, nor with any traditional interpretation of observed nature. Its aim is to be pure creation, that is to say a relationship of forms and colors. Thereby it brings us the discovery of a wholly new value: art conceived as pure gratuity, what Malevitch was to call an "additional element" of life, and which is quite the opposite of the old conception which tends to drown art in life by means of everrepeated appeals to visual memory and the banal flattery of the senses.

And what will be the criterion of this new value? It will be, first of all, the work in itself and its capacity to survive its period. Its non-timeliness, in short. The criterion will therefore be based to a certain extent on those qualities in a work which are foreign to the facilities, to the common inclination of the time in which it comes into being. Not that fashion can be altogether resisted: everyone is subject to it in spite of himself, and the spirit of the time penetrates us in a thousand ways. But alongside of everything that determines us from without there is also what determines us from within, our original personality, that element which comes from ourselves, which, strictly speaking, can come only from ourselves, from our will, from our choice, from our deep being, and which causes the

work to remain inaccessible. The very thing that Kandinsky meant in speaking of "the inner necessity". This is where I expect to find the germ of survival, the absolutely autonomous element which eludes every criterion of school, system or credo. And this germ we all have in ourselves. We need only find it, rediscover it, receive it from ourselves. We need only let it speak its own language. And where should we find this language, if not in the work? It alone will judge us. "Well, the truth of the matter is that we have only our paintings to speak for us", van Gogh wrote in the last letter to his brother. This cuts short all discussion. And yet van Gogh himself provides us with the most perfect example of what words, even clumsy ones, can bring to a work. Through his letters we possess the transposition of the painter's human worries and technical problems in a realm different from painting but every bit as true, every bit as direct as that of his paintings. Writing thus offers an unexpected means of penetrating the work and, indeed, adds a value to value.

Nearly all the great painters have written, and the abstract painters are no exception to the rule. The writings of Mondrian, van Doesburg, Malevitch, Kandinsky, Delaunay, Klee are essential to the knowledge of the art of this period. They are still the best analysts, the best exegetists and also the best popularizers of their works. But it remains true that the painted work, like the written work, will exist only if the future generation adopts it. It is the latter, rather than the present generation, which will judge, understand, admire. At the actual moment when the work springs from the painter's brush or flows from the poet's pen, there is no value measure that can be applied to it, for there is no way of anticipating what its weight will be forty years later.

Art in the nascent state is no different from the newborn child as to whom a thousand soothsayers cannot prophesy what virtues he will possess, even though these are present in him as potentialities.

NASCENT ART! Is there any better definition of art itself than the coupling of these two concepts? Is there a better definition of value in itself than the notion of birth? It indicates the coming into the world of a fragile but complete object, finished by gestation, new, naked,

offered as an easy prey to everything that devours, to everything that envies, to everything that hardens in time.

The nascent state is the wager of life against everything that stagnates. It is an absolute contradiction: a link and a hiatus. A link, because the optimum conditions are secretly present for the repetition of past summits. A hiatus, because this repetition must occur according to new, unpredictable ways, revolting with respect to immobile, that is to say decreasing, values. The nascent state is therefore revolutionary, and it is as such that it assumes the highest conception of traditional values, that is repeats them and contradicts them, incarnates them and refutes them. And this dichotomy is the very soul of its value, its dynamism. When it comes to art, this value can become commercial value only with the help of elements foreign to art, which are always impure and which in themselves are never intrinsic value. A work by van Gogh has no commercial value when it has just been created, yet its entire vital value is there, congenital with the creation, with the nascent state. A poem, even universally recognized as a masterpiece, never has a commercial value.

The nascent state is in truth a step into the void. But this step gives rise to a new solid ground on which followers can find comfortable footing. The commercial value is immediately within their reach, which is why, in another book, I have called them "the coiners". These have innumerable imitators, dazzled by their easy success, whom we could call "counterfeiters". Today painting is a career in which quick fortunes are made. No one dreams of making a career in poetry. The very idea of wanting to be a poet would make people laugh. Yet there is a certain nobility in the contempt for lucre. I see none in the rush for gold.

It is in the nascent state that creation takes place, that obscure forces are tested without ambition or pride. This state is unconscious of the value that it bears; it neither possesses nor makes claims, but it is. Having nothing to safeguard, it knows no fear and its act is honesty itself. For if the first power is life, the second power is the freedom which makes possible, within life itself, those states of birth which are life incarnate.

The case of one painter, who comes within the framework of this book, illustrates these reflections to perfection. I refer to Joseph Lacasse.

When Maurits Bilcke, some years ago, discovered in a dusty garret (1) a big bundle of Lacasse's youthful works, unfixed pastels going back to 1910 and 1911, he laid his hand on some strange forerunners of an art and a style which, forty years later, in other painters, were to become collectors' items. Two of these pastels or crayon-drawings are reproduced in the present book, and everyone can judge the obvious affinities with certain very well known present-day painters. This does not imply the necessity of approaching the work of these painters, which preserves its intrinsic value, in a new perspective, but it does, on the other hand, confer upon Lacasse's youthful works that pure quality of nascent art and makes them, in a sense, "incunabula" of abstract art.

The Norwegian critic Karl Ringström writes as follows: "The art of Lacasse will surely give rise to fervent discussions in the art world. Several non-figurative paintings and pastels are dated 1910, the year when Kandinsky painted his first abstract water-color and wrote his important theoretical treatise, *Über das Geistige in der Kunst*. Kandinsky, who at the time was forty-two years old, already had a considerable body of work behind him, even though he came to Munich to study art only at the age of thirty. He lived in the cultural atmosphere of this city and traveled a great deal (Holland, France, Italy, etc.); At this time Lacasse was only sixteen and could barely read and write. He worked in Tournai, a small town in Belgium, which he left only after the first world war. His only artistic education was given him by a decorator who taught him how to imitate woods and marbles. A world separated these two painters who simultaneously launched upon a revolutionary and unknown path. Kandinsky came to it through a solid intellectual training, a lucid and agile mind, a rare sensitivity. Lacasse reached the same path through pure intuition: he did not even know how to prepare his canvases."

The two — the obscure Belgian worker and the Russian aristocrat who enjoyed all the blessings of fortune and intelligence — are here equally indigent, both similarly unprepared as they face the gaping hole into which they fling themselves, and it is this pure act, this total gratuitousness, which creates as it invents its

(1) In Tournai, at the painter's sister's, his home as a youth.





Joseph LACASSE  
Study No. 7, 1911, 50 x 65, pastel.  
Private collection.



own laws, this *being* united to the imponderable powers of non-knowing, which constitutes the henceforth unimpaired value that the work preserves.

Here is the germ and the difficulty. When Kandinsky makes a clean slate of everything that he has so attentively learned in order to give free rein to a kind of indeterminate absolute of which he finds the spur in himself, when Lacasse works in the black depths of the mine and, at nightfall, after having spent the whole day extracting stones from the mine, tries to extract its secret lights from the stone and communicate them to black paper, art is born. And, at the very same time, in the case of so many artists with famous names, art is not.

Several times in the course of his career, Lacasse was to find himself magnetized, as it were, by his work done in 1910-1911 and this resulted in forms resembling those of that early period. It would be an exaggeration to say that these are his most successful periods. We may merely note that all his life the pastels on black paper were to continue to act strangely on his memory, like secret stimulants. It was certainly when he worked *in* black and *on* black, when he labored in the obscurity of consciousness as well as in the obscurity of the stone quarry, that art, in his case, manifested itself in the pure state. It was then, and not later when he tried to "make a career" like so many others. It was when he was the brother of the miners that he really succeeded, not when he became a colleague.

The early painters worked for the Church, for the Prince, for burghers grown rich in trade. Rare were the paintings then which the painter executed in a fully independent spirit. Yet it is among these last that some of the finest works of history are to be found. We need only mention Rembrandt's *Pilgrims of Emmaüs*, El Greco's *Toledo landscape during a storm*, or Rubens' *Helen Fourment and her children*. These are end-products of culture, and at the same time, in a sense, they go beyond it.

Lacasse's case offers the strange example of a "going beyond" without any cultural basis, a birth of art having no other source and no other support than the painter's fresh and naïve sensibility. Is anything more fragile than such a sensibility? Yet therein lay the artist's greatest strength, his authentic "future". It would be appropriate here to expatiate on the *learned*

*ignorance* dear to Nicolas de Cuse, and to Lao-Tseu when he affirms that the frail of this world must inevitably prevail over the hard.

TO BE SURE, LACASSE and Kandinsky were not alone on the scene. Abstract art sprang up at various points in the world almost at the same date. How is one to account for this secret correspondence of spirits which dictates the same solution to Larionov and Goncharova (in Moscow), to Stolba (in Vienna), to Picabia (in Paris), to Ciurlionis (in Warsaw)? I say "the same solution", and not the same painting, for the styles are very different. But here suddenly, in five or six spots in Europe quite distant from one another, works appear which all tend with the same force toward liberation from the tutelage of the object, which all, each in its own idiom, are trying to say that art exists in and for itself without the support of the object and that one need only be a "musician" to isolate it.

Was it not at about the same period that Claude Monet, in Giverny, painted the famous *Water Lilies*, in which impressionism comes within a hair's breadth of ending up in abstraction?

Later, what the precursors had discovered was to be imitated by painters in great numbers. But I like to distinguish among the precursors themselves a certain parallel imitativeness in the problems that causes them to work concertedly, at times strangely close to one another despite the physical distance.

Some years later, the same phenomenon was to occur when Mondrian (in Holland) Sophie Taeuber and Arp (in Switzerland) Malevitch (in Moscow) almost simultaneously created the first works of geometric abstraction. It was in the very midst of the world war and the armies in the field allowed no communication among the countries mentioned. The spirit, it seems, makes game of such major obstacles.

When the uncertain discovery of the isolated pioneers had by the force of circumstances become a commonplace, a thousand painters, concentrated in great clusters in the big cities, were to become possessed by a holy fire to break down this open door with magnificent unanimity. Some call this the "spirit of the time". I just happen to feel that it is precisely the spirit



which is lacking. It is present where art is born; it is present when, in various parts of the globe, men very different in age and culture draw the same conclusions from the same data, not in the same manner. This has nothing in common with the crazes of fashion, which dictates a banal uniformity of style. What the spirit of imitation lacks is precisely the spirit. On the other hand, when in the pursuit of a single idea we observe the diversity of types of expression, their unexpected and inevitably unseasonable apparition, then — by its capricious, ever unusual manner — we can recognize the real presence of the spirit which blows whither it wills and as it wills.

ABSTRACT ART IS REPROACHED for being decorative, for tending to become hermetic, for catering solely to snobbish tastes, for degenerating into the repetitive and the facile. I want to deal with these objections.

First, the objection that it is decorative. All visual art in all ages has served to decorative life. Why should abstract art escape this rule? It is neither more nor less decorative than romanesque painting, than the *Bayeux tapestry* or Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* or Picasso's *Fall of Icarus*.

The objection that it tends to become hermetic. This is the least justified of reproaches. For abstract art tends, on the contrary, to clarity, to simplicity. As well accuse Bach and Mozart of being hermetic. Former art is much more vulnerable to this reproach than abstract art. It is recommended that one be versed in the arcana of theology in order fully to appreciate van Eyck's *Mystic Lamb*, to know Biblical history at least in order to be able to "read" the images that succeed one another on the walls of the cathedrals. In the abstract field one need only have an eye that is sensitive to very free compositions in which rhythm and invention combine. Hermeticism today remains the apanage of a stepped-up surrealism.

The reproach of snobbery. This objection concerns the superficial aspect of abstract art, not its deep current. Snobbery never was aware of Mondrian's existence until he was dead, nor of Sophie Taeuber's, nor of Arp's before he was seventy. It does, to be sure, take possession of a hundred little painters who are almost

snatched from the cradle and who can only transcribe what others have done, those precisely whom snobbery never knew, could not know, because it was necessary to look under chairs, behind doors — of which it is incapable, because its eyes register only what glitters, its ears only bluff.

The objection of the repetitive and the facile. This objection relates to what I have just said about the little painters whom snobbery sustains. The repetitive and the facile are of course everywhere, but so is originality, which is much less visible. Originality never shouts, because it does not usually recognize itself as such. Then, on discovering it, one finds at the same time the profound repetition, the bold facility. For everything is repetition, only the idiom is new, and what appears complex and difficult is almost always merely unresolved. Great art disconcerts us first of all by its easy accessibility.

Despite all the snobberies in action, it is necessary stubbornly to make the distinction between the one who draws something from himself and in so doing goes counter to what was preestablished, and the one who draws something from others and in so doing follows a path already known. The latter is the current artist, the traditional producer of works of art. We must be very indulgent toward the former, for he is the true creator, and it even may happen that he does not know he is an artist, or that he is reluctant to bedeck himself with this devaluated name. We must be severe toward the latter who will have no difficulty in gathering around himself his court of "enlightened" admirers, satisfied to hear himself told by the ignorant that he is "as powerful as van Gogh". They forget, in saying this, that van Gogh was never "powerful". van Gogh today neither shocks nor astonishes. Any more, for that matter, than does a continuator of Kandinsky, of Mondrian, or indeed of Pollock. And one is led to wonder whether there is still to be found, somewhere in the world, that vein of pure creation which is indifferent to success and cares only about bringing to birth. Bringing to birth what? The eternal repetition, the profound simplicity which reveals itself to be new in each generation. This is value in the unimpaired state which I have just called nascent art.

It is sufficient, it seems to me, really to seek, to look everywhere, never to weary of comparing, of ques-

tioning, of weighing, to explore every nook and cranny, to note every sign. The values are certainly there, today as yesterday, plainly visible, within the reach of the hand. To be sure, they must first be found. But they are not always as remotely hidden as people believe. Sometimes even they are to be found in broad daylight, and it may be that these are the most difficult to find.

THE NATURE OF LIFE is to be in a hurry, the nature of the spirit is not to be. The one runs toward achievement, pushing aside if necessary what has already been achieved; the other stands by and observes. But why observe, when everything shows that one should run? Why this attention? Why this slowness? And what is the meaning of this curb? The first answer that comes to mind is that a poison calls for a counterpoison. But something else is involved. This dilemma cannot be resolved by a simple antagonism. The truth is that there

are two natures in nature: the one that perceives and the one that knows, sensitive affectivity and memory; and two attractions: the beginning and the end, the source and the objective, immanence and progression. It is therefore necessary to go forward and to conserve at one and the same time. To run and to maintain. To innovate and to preserve. This is what is asked of us, of each one of us as an individual, of all of us together as a society. But this is a feat we accomplish every day by simple walking on our two feet, since we advance, since we carry and balance, on those unstable extremities, our heavy person with its baggage and its hopes, since, at every step, we put off the fall to a further point.

Can these ideas be applied to abstract art? I believe so. In abstract art we touch both tradition — not in its superficial conformity, but in its real depth, I mean in the activity of the valid constants — and the most revolutionary renovation. This, to be sure, is not yet generally admitted. For myself, it is obvious and requires no demonstration other than the existence of the works, their vitality in the world of today.



## II. - ABSTRACT PAINTING IN FLANDERS BETWEEN THE TWO WARS

THERE ARE NO SMALL COUNTRIES, there are only small minds, and the biggest countries in the world have an abundant supply of them. If Paris or New York were like some of their inhabitants they would be as "small town" as a sub-prefecture of the Creuse. What does it matter, then, that the Eiffel Tower or the Empire State Building are taller than the steeple of a village church? But Paris contains instances of great courage which break the matrix of mediocrity, and I have seen in Belgium examples of similar courage, fine and untrumpeted successes, indubitable values which need to be better known, and this will give its substance, gives its *raison d'être* to the present book.

One could equally well write the annals of abstract art in other small countries of Europe, like Switzerland or Holland, for example. Dadaism had its birth in the former, the *De Stijl* movement in the latter. These facts, combined with the enormous development of abstract art in all the countries in the world in the last twenty years, would fully justify writing such annals.

No important movement had its birth in Belgium. But this country has its finger in everything. It has connections with *De Stijl* through Vantongerloo, with dadaism through Joostens and Pansaers, with cubism through Martha Donas, with futurism through Schmalzigaug, with surrealism through Magritte and Delvaux, with expressionism through the whole Laethem school. And it touches, not with the tips of its fingers, but with its whole hands, immediately embracing what it loves. Evil tongues may say it is a country of apes. As though all countries were not apes nowadays, as though there were not an ape in every man, which slumbers less often than the proverbial pig.

There is no garden so small that it cannot grow the rarest flower. All that is needed is the seed. Everyone knows what a sovereign flower of painting grew in the garden of the Flanders of the fifteenth to the eighteenth century. European culture then had two centers of attraction: Italy and Flanders, the one founded on the splendor of princes and burghers, the other on the

splendor of the burghers alone. France had not yet, at least in the beginning of this period, found the great civilizing role through letters that was to fall to her. The art of living, the love of beautiful things were more developed in the great Flemish cities than in Paris itself. One need only visit the house of Plantin, in Antwerp, to have the revelation of that security, of that calm force, that *enjoyment of this world* which even the Spanish fury was unable to root out. So it is still today. Between times, it is true, the dubious taste of the nineteenth century made luxury palatable to the petty bourgeoisie, as today the monoprix shops transmit it to the lower classes. This state of things is universal and, all things considered, beneficial. But the opulence of Flemish interiors has about it something special, even when the taste is mediocre. To begin with, painting dominates. But also, how many books! I have the impression that nowhere in the world do people read as much as in Belgium, that no country is so avid of all cultures. Its geographic situation is without doubt the prime cause of this. The natural appetite of its inhabitants is an additional factor. They want to know, see and experience everything. What characterizes the Fleming first and foremost is his enormous capacity for digestion. Whence his generous temperament, his love of work, his love of love. He can adapt to anything, he adopts a thousand things, but he does not on this account reject. What he so well assimilates he makes Flemish. What did the Flemish painters of the great period go looking for in Italy if not the secrets of art? And what did they find if not an enrichment of Flemish painting? And does the recent "Flemish expressionism", I mean the Laethem painters (1), have much in common with German expressionism?

The spirit of the time, to be sure, is not favorable to "regionalism, and we shall leave the little folklore games to nearsighted governments. The past cannot be resuscitated. It need only be present in the works. There it is authentic, effortless. I do not think that one can expect very much today from certain "safe" traditionalist virtues. The age of the jet plane and of the rocket to the moon does not have a great deal in common with the age that witnessed the building of the

cathedrals. But, mad though our race may be, we do not leave this behind, we carry in our baggage the polyptych of Saint-Bavon with the Parthenon and the Sistine Chapel and the temple of Barabudur, Siva dancing and the tympanum of Moissac, Lascaux and Terborgh. The roots are there, all the roots and all the sources. They are more vigorous than ever, in fact, being present all at the same time. The values of the past no longer concern a limited region, a closed culture, but everyman. Thus we are all Greeks and Flemings. It behooves us all to be Japanese and French, Buddhist and Christian. It is a question of growth. Whoever stops growing has already stopped living. We must grow, advance. But with everything.

THIS FLAT OR GENTLY ROLLING COUNTRY that extends from the middle course of the Meuse to the vast beaches of the North Sea, passing through the middle course of the Escaut and its calm tributaries, the regions with their naturally rich river deposits, without climatic extremes, have been abundantly endowed with the seed of painting. No one in the world is unmindful of the harvest of masterpieces that was gathered there: it belongs to humanity's patrimony. But closer to us, since the end of the last century, how many names, in the order of painting, which deserve to be better known! Among twenty that come immediately to mind I shall mention only five: James Ensor, Jakob Smits, Constant Permeke, Rik Wouters, Frits Van den Berghe. And what diversity we find here, or what diverse use of the same richness of spirit, of the same force!

A country open to all influences, we said. Yet it is with the Low Countries of the North, with its racial and cultural brothers, that exchanges were the least numerous until 1914 (1).

The war was to change this state of mind in a marked way through the Flemish artists and intellectuals who then found refuge in Holland, or who, as soldiers of the Belgian army, were interned there, the German armies having turned them back at the frontier. Such

(1) For everything concerning this movement reference should be made to the excellent work by Paul Haesaerts: « Histoire de la peinture moderne en Flandre », Editions Arcade, Brussels, 1960.

(1) I mean, of course, since the seventeenth century, when the country was split into two separate entities.



was the case, in particular, of the Antwerp painter and sculptor Georges Vantongerloo. Interned at the Hague, but enjoying considerable freedom, he made contact with his compatriot Rik Wouters, whose influence he very visibly underwent, and shortly after, with Theo van Doesburg.

VAN DOESBURG WAS THE MOST accomplished example of the intellectual adventurer. Enterprising, exceptionally intelligent, fearless, never missing an opportunity to break a few neighbors' windows, he jostled everyone and finally managed to sweep in his impetuous wake the man most rebellious to quick decisions. Such, precisely, was Mondrian. With his slow pace he had difficulty keeping up with van Doesburg in his daily, sometimes contradictory, discoveries. Yet he was finally carried away by his enthusiasm over creating an art review, which he had resisted for two years, judging the undertaking to be risky and premature.

Without leaving Holland, van Doesburg had seen everything, sensed everything. The articles he had published since 1912 in numerous Dutch reviews, the little popularizing books he was soon to publish, prove his vast information in the realm of *avant-garde* art, and his sharpness of mind as well. The review that he dreamed of publishing was to be called *The Straight Line*, but the contributors decided in favor of a less technical title, and it became *De Stijl* (The Style).

van Doesburg immediately found a phrase to summarize the situation: "*Styl*, he wrote, is *waarheid in rust aanschouwen*" (Style is contemplating truth at leisure). But his abrupt changes of mood were as frequent as his bright ideas. At the very outset he quarreled with van der Leek (1). That a man so versatile could have been the "boss" of *De Stijl*, could have become the indefatigable propagandist for the most severe, the most ascetic doctrine that history has ever known, is something of a paradox. One need only

thumb through the issues of the review, however, read a few articles, to become aware of the inner tensions and the many deviations that surrounded the moral axis — by which I mean the solid, the imperturbable personality of Mondrian. Even when, in 1924, Mondrian abandoned the review to the stormy weather of van Doesburg's editorship his occult presence remained, his growing reputation shed its glow over *De Stijl* and was, in the end, the guarantee of its survival.

Essentially these powerful Dutch ideas had their origin in cubism, and here too it was undoubtedly Mondrian who was the initiator. van Doesburg had in fact for several years seen the submissions of the Parisian cubist painters to the annual exhibitions of the *Moderne Kunstkring* (Amsterdam Circle of Modern Art). Mondrian regularly participated in this Salon and his works were the only ones that showed how it was possible to go beyond cubism by the simple reduction of the linear system to the horizontal and vertical elements and, going hand in hand with this logical evolution, the complete elimination of the object.

VANTONGERLOO, VERY QUICKLY WON OVER to these new ideas, in 1917 effected a radical transformation of his art, both in painting and in sculpture. Faithful to the terminology dear to Mondrian, he always spoke of evolution, but we may observe that there is an infinite distance between the divisionist paintings, landscapes and figures, which he painted in 1916, and the *Abstract Composition* of 1917, an organization of circles and triangles in a circle; that there is even an enormous leap, a revolutionary leap, between the *Crouching Man of Volendam*, sculptured in 1916, and the famous *Abstract Statuettes* of 1917: the *Spherical Construction* in straight lines, in the Philadelphia Museum, and the *Spherical Construction* in curved lines, in the Museum of Modern Art of New York. It may be that the artist has profited by earlier reflections and experiments, but the fact remains that in his work the change is sudden and complete.

For several years painting was to remain in the background in Vantongerloo's work. It was as a sculptor that he belonged to van Doesburg's group and it was

(1) I am sorry to be obliged to deal only briefly with the history of the birth of the « *De Stijl* » movement. The reader who wishes to inform himself more fully may refer to my other works: « *Piet Mondrian, sa vie, son œuvre* », Flammarion, Paris 1956, « *Dictionnaire de la peinture abstraite* », Hazan, Paris 1957, and especially « *L'Art abstrait, ses origines, ses premiers maîtres* », Maeght, Paris 1949.

with the accompaniment of this qualifier that his signature appeared on the back of the *De Stijl* Manifesto, published at the end of 1918. In 1919, in Brussels, he made two sculptures of small dimensions, no less well known than those mentioned above, and which will remain in history the first creations of abstract sculpture in orthogonal geometry. The series was continued when the artist settled in Menton, still in 1919, and it was here that in 1921 the junction with painting was effected by a series of small works of pure neo-plastic style and a small wood relief with two painted shutters in which the two disciplines unite in the happiest manner.

I met Vantongerloo in Menton, in 1925. I had rented a room in the very house he was living in on the Val du Carei. I stayed there for two months. The artist's major concern at that time was the quantitative calculation of the relative value of the colors. He explains it with a great array of figures in a small book which he had in fact just then published (*L'Art et son avenir*, De Sikkel, Antwerp 1924) and which, along with professions of faith, contains parts which are less than luminous. I much prefer certain pages of the book that he published in America, in 1948. This is how he presents his adherence to the doctrine of pure form, that is, the plane division of the plane surface :

"Art, which we cannot define since it offers no means of measuring it, strikes us powerfully as belonging to the infinite. A salient feature, by the very fact that it imposes itself, shatters harmony. But a relation is always harmonious. The infinite contains spirit and matter, light, expression, etc., but it pushes none of these characteristics into the foreground. Salient features impose themselves. All the characteristics of the infinite are perceptible, but not visible in a theatrical manner. They must all exist discreetly as though they did not exist. When we feel our stomach, our feet, our head, something is wrong. Each thing must function without hindering the others."

Such, indeed — as the artist believes he observes it in nature — is the neo-plastic law of the relation of planes to one another in order to obtain the unity of the plane surface (*vlakverdeling*).

In 1925, Vantongerloo was also much concerned with the problem of finding ways of introducing modern art into daily life. To this end he had carefully designed and executed a tea-service according to the

principles of pure form. It was in a sense a continuation of the investigations of the architect Rietveld in the field of furniture. This tea-service, which was yellow and black, finally turned up in Paris, in the studio of Mondrian, who felt a little embarrassed about using it, and out of a tactful regard for his friend exhibited the teapot as an art object on a little pier-table attached to the wall (1).

Vantongerloo was always to continue his investigations in the field of the integration of the arts. At the Cercle et Carré exhibition on the rue La Boétie, in April 1930, his submission consisted of three abstract sculptures in aluminium which were at the same time models of landing fields for planes or helicopters. It was at this same period that he made a design for a bridge over the Escaut, in Antwerp, his native town.

I also remember the apartment of a diamond dealer, near the Parc Monceau in Paris, which Vantongerloo had entirely decorated in accordance with the laws of pure form. This decoration, which would still today be unique of its kind, has unfortunately disappeared.

Mondrian himself, in about 1924, had made an interior decorating plan for Ida Bienert, an inhabitant of Dresden, but it remained in the state of a flat drawing.

For some years Vantongerloo has pursued the idea of a sometimes highly original combination of color and plexiglas, of volume and wire, of opaqueness and transparency, of fixedness and movement. For he has long since abandoned the formulæ of pure form to devote himself to the geometry of what he calls the *indeterminate*. Straight lines have consequently given way to delicate curves, at times shaded, at times bright with colors, to dots, to something that looks like nebulae, always on a white background which the artist carefully prepares. If the results are debatable, it cannot be said that the artist is following a beaten path.

Five or six years ago, Vantongerloo took part in a congress in Milan at which learned critics and professors dealt with the "divine proportion". He caused a sensation by proposing to the listeners that they open the world of art to *non-measurable dimensions*. "What is it in art that attracts you?" he asks in *Problems of Contemporary Art*. "Is it not the imponderable? Isn't it

(1) In Flanders, at about this period, the principles of « De Stijl » were being applied by the architect Huib Hoste, both in architecture itself and in all the details of the furnishings.





4.  
Georges VANTONGERLOO  
Composition XV,  
emanating from the equation  
 $y = x^2 + bx + 18$ , 1930  
118 x 60, oil on linen.  
Private collection, New York.

his sense of the incommensurable that the artist wishes to express? Is it not the incommensurable that the viewer wishes to feel, through the work of art?" There is some satisfaction in noting that the most "mathematical" of artists and the philosopher agree in recognizing the presence of mystery and the failure of all definitions, of all figures.

In his small studio in the Impasse du Rouet, Vantongerloo continues his investigations with the same passion, the same fervor as when, thirty-five years ago, he was studying "the weight of colors". One may laugh at the childishness, at the blunders of an artist, one may be disgusted by his vulgar speech, his petty acts — all this in the last analysis means nothing. It is the work alone that speaks. He disappears, it remains.

ARE THERE TABU YEARS in history? Certain years possess so powerful an impact that they cannot be blotted from memory. 622, 800, 1302, 1789. But our individual life has its own liturgy of dates, its day-book. In mine 1921 is marked by a stone which will remain white. That year I founded the review *Het Overzicht* which was to become, a year later, thanks to the collaboration of Jozef Peeters, the first cultural link between Flanders and the rest of Europe (and even America: in 1923 we had five subscriptions in Detroit!).

Who was I?

At the end of 1918, at the age of seventeen, I had left the *collège* without any diploma, having painfully, in an environment hostile to my dreams and to my fancy, done five years of Latin and four of Greek. The following January 1<sup>st</sup> I brought out, on blue paper, the first issue of the review *De Klauwaert* which I went and sold clandestinely after school. The venture succeeded to the extent that better-organized students were able to take over by the fifth issue and transform it into the review *Storm*. Toward the end of the same year I published — this time on gray paper — the two numbers of the review *Roeland* (1). At the same

time, forced by my family to find a remunerative occupation, I became an errand-boy for a maritime journal, an employee in an insurance company and in a navigation company, a draughtsman's assistant for two architects, and I read a great deal. My fervor was divided between Gezelle's lyrical tenderness and the revolutionary strength of Walt Whitman, torn between the style of Racine and the cry of Rimbaud; my enthusiasm of the moment was undoubtedly Nietzsche, but just before that it had been wholly for Emerson, for Carlyle, for Romain Rolland (1); my mind was no less attracted by Multatuli, by Pascal. There was nothing in the intellectual realm that did not arouse my thirst. From the very multiplicity of shocks a certain immobility results, a cerebral torment which paralyzes. From this "difficulty of being", pro-Flemish agitation was a happy escape. It offered action, and an issue from intellectual blind alleys. A great deal of lyricism entered into this political passion. The pro-Flemish demonstrations, almost a daily event at the time in Antwerp, were like holidays (2). The excitement of it all went a little to our heads. The young man of twenty that I was then found in this activity an outlet for his natural exaltation.

At the beginning of 1921 I became friendly with Geert Pijnenburg who had published *Staatsgevaarlijk* (dangerous for the State), and on June 15th we published the first issue of *Het Overzicht* (which can be translated: the panorama, the summary), a deliberately colorless title which was to conceal a review of pro-Flemish propaganda and of literary avant-gardism. As I had done two years before with *De Klauwaert*, Pijnenburg and I sold the copies of the new review to the crowds coming out from the great Flemish political meetings. It was in October of that same year, I believe, that I struck up acquaintance with Jozef Peeters, and almost at the same time, with Theo van Doesburg, on the

(1) The very great influence of the works of Romain Rolland on the minds of youth in the years 1919 to 1921 needs to be remembered. We had all read « Jean-Christophe ». We knew by heart passages full of gay alliterations out of « Colas Breugnot », in which the earthy kernel of France combined with the traditional Flemish truculence. And we read « Liluli » in the edition illustrated by Frans Masereel with pictures that were both powerful and spiritual. They have certainly contributed to registering indelibly in my mind the goddess « Loôp'ih » (public opinion) and Chirridichiquilla, the beautiful woman with the swallow's cry.

(2) Which at times ended tragically, as was the case on July 11th, 1920, when the student Herman van de Reek was killed by a policeman in the middle of the Main Square of Antwerp, a few paces away from the author of this book.

(1) I was helped and greatly encouraged in these undertakings by a boy older than myself whose name was Julius van Beeck.



occasion of a lecture by the latter on the *De Stijl* movement at the Antwerp Atheneum. He gave the same lecture in Brussels, if my memory is correct, a few days later. The poet Pierre Bourgeois, the brother of the architect, recently reminded me of his lecture, adding that "for us it was the beginning of everything". He meant that the founding, a short time later, of the Brussels review and group *Sept Arts* could be properly attributed to van Doesburg's visit (1).

IN ANTWERP, IMMEDIATELY AFTER van Doesburg's lecture, I decided to open the pages of *Het Overzicht* to abstract art, and I invited Peeters to contribute.

I had, as a matter of fact, already accepted some engravings by Edmond Van Dooren which were almost abstract, and the review had published a small album of linoleum cuts by the same artist, several of which strikingly resembled similar works by Peeters. However this may be, Peeters' authority was brilliantly manifested in the December 1921 issue with a very powerful abstract linoleum-cut which accompanied a doctrinal article, *Gemeenschapskunst* (community art). This article is worth rereading today. From the first sentences the commanding tone reveals Peeters' character, as well as a clear judgment and a solid fund of information :

"For us, community artists, all -isms are a thing of the past. Every day before breakfast we used to be told of the birth of a new -ism which, through its slight theoretical difference, was as attractive to us as all the preceding ones, while the results were wholly unacceptable to us because of their plagiarism of previous -isms. The consequence was that the production of the works went into the wastebasket. Purism, which was the last to suffer such a fate, is still vividly present to our memories because of the contraction of our sto-

machs it caused by its bottle style, which was like a variant of the violin and mandoline style of cubism.

"Most of those -isms have proved that they were but screaming posters to attract the buying public. And this is no less true of the Dutch pure form which believed it could impose a style upon us and even sent us traveling salesmen for this purpose.

"This exordium is not intended to create the impression that we are lacking in the respect we owe to artists who, through their work, have given the necessary impetus to the evolution of art. Quite to the contrary, we are perfectly aware of our debt to those who helped us lose our innocence. Without being their epigones, we are ready to recognize that it is their revolutionary acts that have awakened us.

.....

"Flanders can now record the fact that community art places it in the front rank of the revolution of pictorial form, this direction being followed by two plasticians : Karel Maes and Jozef Peeters, that is to say myself. Far from having achieved a new system, community art by its very nature which differentiates it from previous artistic tendencies, gives the greatest and the purest freedom to the executor. And at the same time it is attuned to the spirit of the time."

.....

And this is the end of the article :

"We compose with the means offered us by geometric figures and push them to the highest expression of their data. Without the slightest introduction of a literary or symbolic content, rejecting any and all speculation of an ideo- or physioplastic or pure plastic nature. Our basis has nothing in common with any other that has preceded us. It has sprung from the passion to build, which is a generally human characteristic of our time." (*Het Overzicht*, no. 9-10).

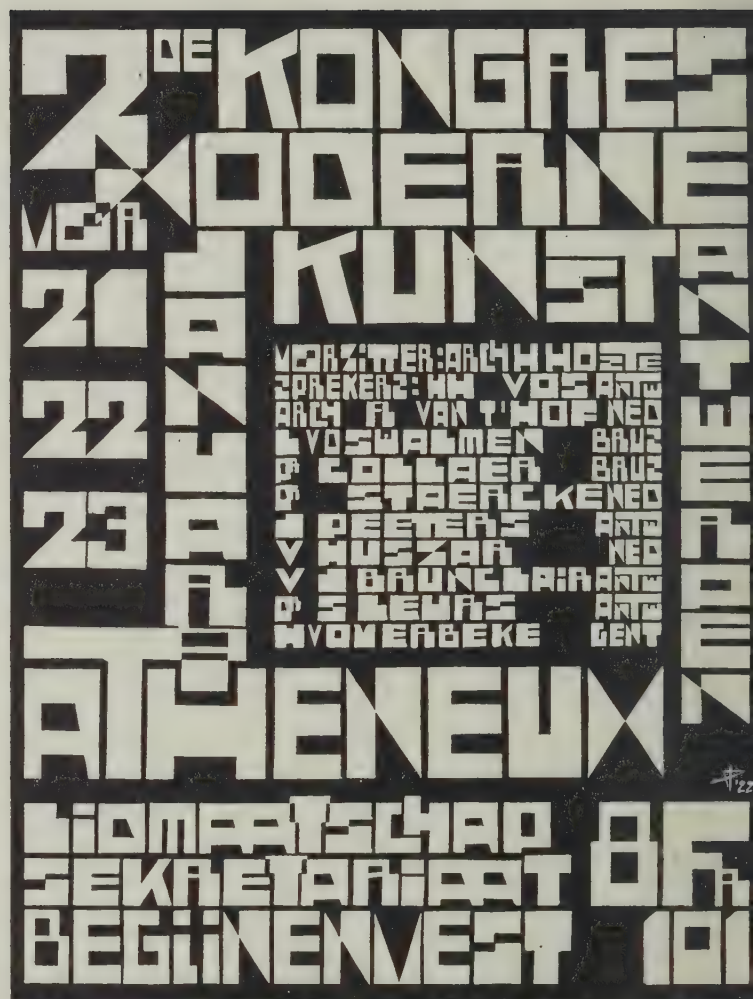
Peeters, as we can see, does not pull his punches. A certain tone which meant : *now we dominate history and we decide to begin a new era* was then common to many manifestoes. Peeters had found the elements of this in the writings of the futurists, but especially, closer to home, in the general tone of van Doesburg who was full of cocksureness. It is at him, the reader will have guessed, that the barbed epithet, "traveling salesmen" was aimed.

(1) Van Doesburg had delivered a first lecture in Brussels in 1920. He had been introduced, I am told, by Vantongerloo who himself was the lecturer's translator, speaking in Dutch. I did not attend this lecture and I was not informed of it at the time. It seems at times as though there were a cultural customs barrier between Antwerp and Brussels calculated to hinder the most normal exchanges. Thus the jet plane and mondovision which practically eliminate the distance between Paris and New York are unable to bring one inch closer to each other two cities in the same country, or even two villages in the same canton. The world may be shrinking, but in the intimacy of things nothing has changed : each locality remains individualized, with its own particularism, as each plant has its distinct roots which it cultivates and grows instinctively, even if the shoots become tangled with others.



5.  
Jozef PEETERS  
Review cover, 1922, 33 x 24.  
M.S. collection, Paris.

THE CERCLE D'ART MODERNE, founded by Peeters, held its second congress in the Antwerp Athenaeum, in January 1922. It was he who directed it, who pulled all the strings. He was the titular treasurer, and the congress secretariat had its headquarters in his house; he alone gave two lectures; the program was illustrated by six abstract vignettes drawn by himself, and finally the congress poster, an amazing horizontal-vertical composition, a linoleum-cut printed in blue, was also done by him. The catalogue of the exhibition held in conjunction with the congress announced the participation of Archipenko, Balla, Klee, Puni, Schwitters, Molzahn, Pal-



6.  
Jozef PEETERS  
Placard for the Second Congress  
of Modern Art, 1922, 65 x 50.  
M.S. collection, Paris.

ladini, Campendonk and many others. Among the local artists I note twelve submissions by Maes, fourteen by Joostens, sixteen by Peeters, two by Servranckx, three by Flouquet, six by De Troyer, thirteen by Tour Donas (Marthe Donas), five by Jos Leonard, seven by Vanton-gerloo, eight by Van Dooren, two by Felix De Boeck. This was really a great event for Antwerp! I confess that I do not remember an exhibition of this scope, with such an abundance of works, with so many contributing names. Memory is entitled to lapses when it is called upon for facts going back more than forty years. What still remains as freshly present to my mind,

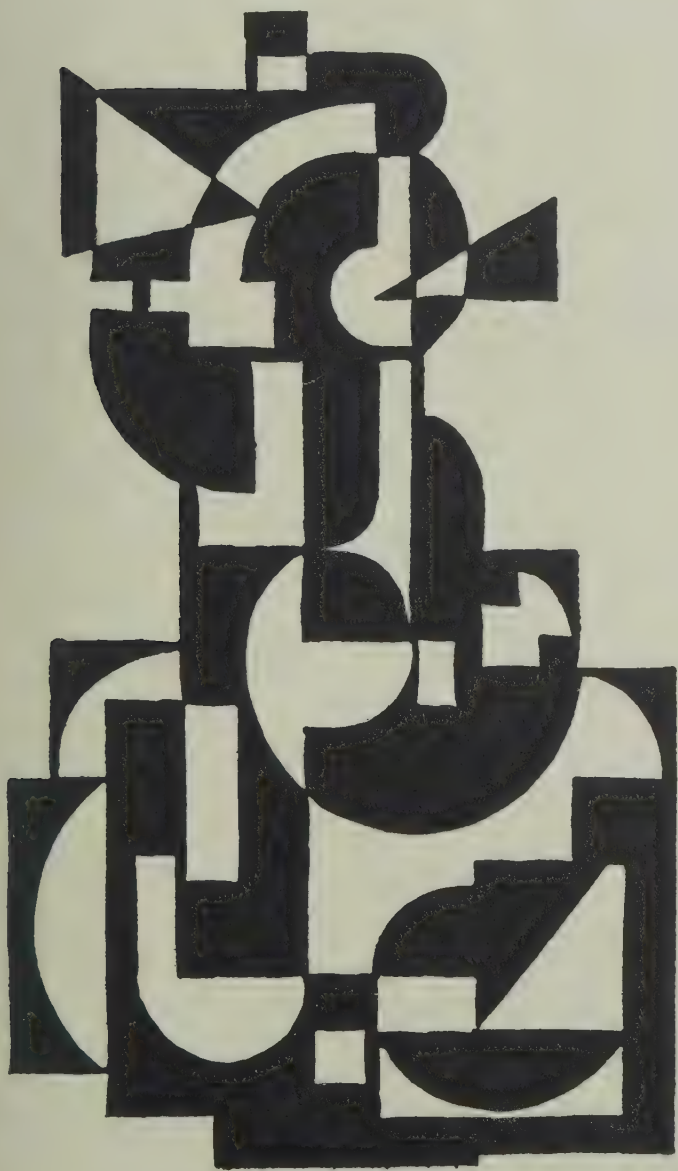


however, is Peeters's activity and even more the solid conviction, the faith he then had, which moved mountains of inertia around him.

Six months later, this time in Bruges, in a room of the Belfry, the third and last congress of the Cercle d'Art Moderne was held. Once again Peeters did wonders. He was only twenty-seven years old and he spoke with the authority of a faculty dean! After his long lecture he held his own against the opposition, which

had come in force. Here is a part of the report of the event that I wrote in *Het Overzicht*.

"The discussion, after the lecture, developed moments of tension. But Peeters's impressively resourceful eloquence, which rather took the audience by surprise, finally carried him through to victory and won the enthusiastic approval of the entire hall. An amusing little scene among many others: Peeters at several points spoke of monism, and some priests in the back



7.  
Edmond VAN DOOREN  
Invention, 1921, 17 x 10, linoleum-cut.  
M.S. Collection, Paris.



8.  
Edmond VAN DOOREN  
Improvisation, 1920, 24 x 18, linoleum-cut.  
M.S. Collection, Paris.

of the hall kept thinking he was saying pantheism and got the impression that they were hearing an anti-religious speech. They become threatening and demanded that Peeters make an unambiguous statement as to his religious position. Peeters then said : 'No artist is an atheist, he bears divinity within himself and makes it radiate through his work, through his creative power.' There was applause in the front rows, but in the back of the hall a roar could be heard which grew threateningly in volume. The applause then ceased, and a member of the audience turned and faced the hall and shouted : 'Listen to those impudent people — they are booing God !' There was a dead silence. "

Peeters was for four or five years the spokesman of abstract art in Flanders. His activities were numerous and effective. He had a gift for organization, enthusiasm, a healthy ambition. I have difficulty in understanding how such a man could have ceased all intellectual and pictorial activity for thirty years. The education of his children, the responsibility of caring for a sick wife are not, cannot be sufficient reasons. Where could he have found the strength to resist the inner pressure, to deny his love, to muzzle his imagination day after day, hour after hour ? Will and discipline, if they can accomplish this feat, are wholly negative, and the heroism is a frightful one. It may be that the man was too fond of acting directly on people to resign himself to working secretly and building a work in defiance of a hostile environment. He was of those who require a response. When, in about 1956, the new intellectual climate provided him with young interlocutors full of admiration for his early work, the painter quite naturally went back and resumed his artistic activity at the point at which he had left it. His first concern seems to have been to establish a solid bridge with the past. Several paintings are simply the carrying out of projects conceived in 1921, others are transpositions into painting of linoleum-cuts engraved in 1925, still others are re-editions, done with the greatest possible fidelity, of works destroyed or lost. There was a renewal of social exchange. Peeters exhibited, participated in demonstrations of youths; the brilliant means that had once been his were all there again, and he was progressing with a work to the glorification of Tyl rising from its ashes, when death overtook him.

PEETERS, LIKE MONDRIAN, HAD REACHED geometric abstraction by the most roundabout way. Nine years of study at the Academy of Fine Arts of Antwerp had left an indelible trace on the painter's method, which always revealed great technical skill. Even his first sketches betray a sure hand. A solid paint quality is the mark of those trained in the schools, whether they be revolutionaries or traditionalists. At twenty, then, Peeters painted divisionist landscapes and portraits. He next passed through a phase of theology and symbolism, like Mondrian again, but his manner was more declamatory. We are in Flanders where there is no lack of warmth. In 1918, Peeters's technique lost something of its heaviness and in 1919, influenced, he said, by futurism but probably also by Kandinsky, whose writings he knew, he painted a series of abstract water-colors, all of which he called *Fantasia* and which have a free, airy lyricism quite unexpected in this painter. His plastic imagination was at that time much closer to the prevailing painting of 1960 than to that of his time.

To the same year belongs the large water-color, *Rue nationale*, reproduced in the present volume, in which we see the futurist and cubist influences interweaving in a very interesting manner. In a painting on glass of 1920, *Vitalité des roses*, we come upon the circular rhythms dear to Delaunay, but this remains exceptional. The other paintings of 1920 and the following years are of a cubist character pushed to the point of geometric abstraction. Peeters's style is then rather close to that of the Hungarians Peri, Moholy-Nagy and Kassak at the same period. One also recalls certain paintings or collages by Severini of 1913 and Arp's large collage-paintings of 1915.

In 1921 the painter made the journey to Paris and paid visits to Gleizes, to Léger and to Mondrian. It was especially the last who attracted or intrigued him, for he had read *Le Néo-Plasticisme*, a small monograph dedicated "to the men of the future", and he was a subscriber to the review *De Stijl*. The contact between the two men (the one was forty-nine, the other twenty-six) was somewhat disappointing, Mondrian having raised an objection before Peeters's linoleum-cuts.

Nevertheless pure neo-plasticism remained for Peeters an obvious temptation. It is very visible in the detail of certain works. A Water-color — one of the first



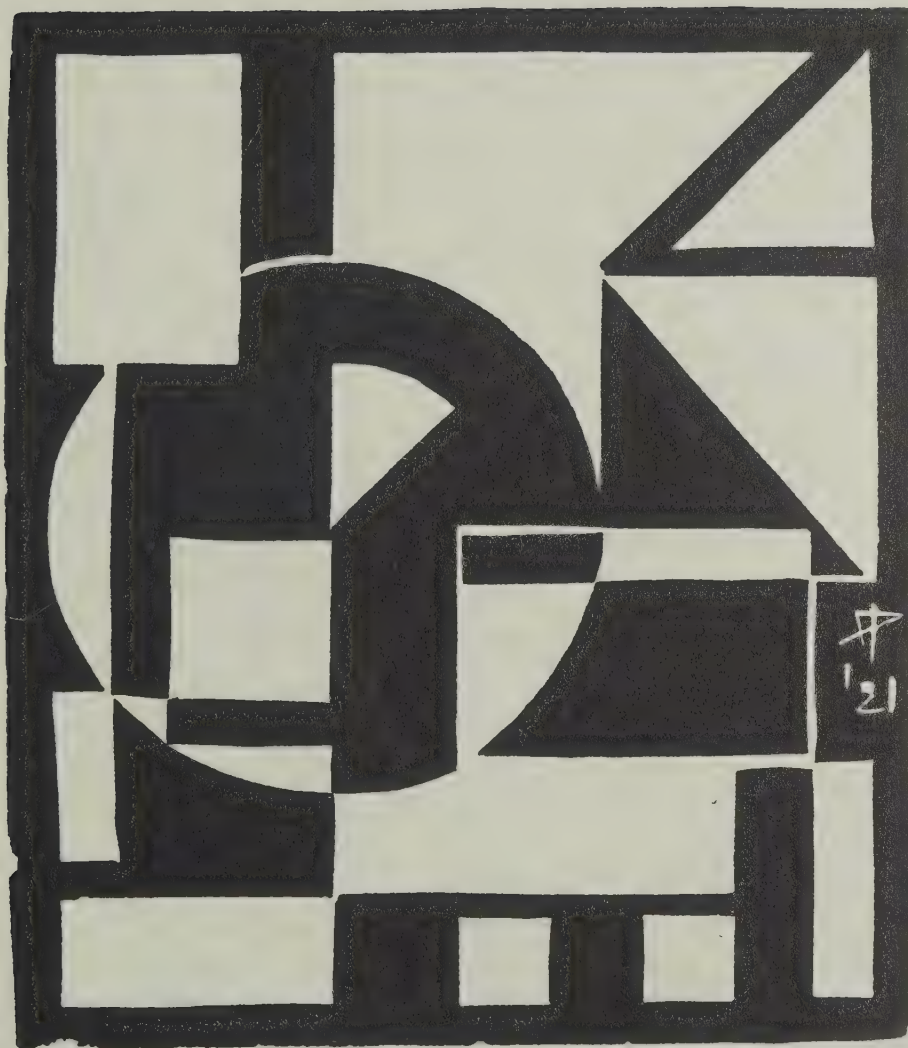


9.  
Jozef PEETERS  
National street, 1919, 90 x 80, water-color.  
Private collection.



10.  
Jozef PEETERS  
Lino, 1920, 17 x 14.  
M.S. collection, Paris.





11.  
Jozef PEETERS  
Lino, 1921, 15 x 13.  
Private collection.

— dated Paris, September 1921, redone in a larger format in May 1922, is almost entirely composed of horizontal and vertical planes.

1921 is also an important year for abstract linoleum-cuts. Peeters, Karel Maes and Edmond Van Dooren were first-rate in this field. Wood-cuts and linoleum-cuts were widely practiced in Flanders at that time. The frankness of this technique, the absence of all shading, its simple strength obtained by the necessity of abbreviating to the extreme, all this combined with the moderate cost of the materials, made it very popular with the Flemings. Great artists, who were soon to become universally known, had devoted their talents to it exclusively. We need only recall the names of Masereel and the Cantré brothers. Joris Minne, Henri Van Straten and Victor Delhez were likewise making their start at that time. And 1922 saw the publication in Paris of *Job le Pauvre* by Jean de Bosschère, with fourteen wood engravings, printed on brightcolored papers, strangely expressive works. But these artists did not abandon the figure or the object, even if the interpretation they gave of them put them straight on the path of abstract art. Only Delhez let himself be drawn into it, on a gamble or a whim, rather than out of conviction.

For Peeters, Maes and Van Dooren, in 1920 and 1921, the thing that mattered was to introduce pure form into the art of black and white (1). They did so with force and frankness. Looking back, in 1962, on the linoleum-cuts of the three artists, we see how close this language is to that of certain artists of today who fetch very high prices. We also note that they had a mastery which has not been surpassed. The conquerors of new territory have a freedom never achieved by those who later settle on the conquered lands. A freedom, a candor. For a short period the works in black and white of the three artists resemble one another so closely that one wonders if they did not work in collaboration in the same studio. It is a phenomenon of simple interpermeability which can be observed in the cubist group in 1912, in the *De Stijl* group in 1918. A collective art exists at rare moments when artists enjoying the same freedom draw from certain causes the same conclusions and find in one another the justification for their research. But

these situations are of short duration. Edmond Van Dooren, as early as 1922, veered toward romantic naturalism. Maes was to continue until 1924, and then this spring in which some of us placed such great hopes seemed to become afflicted with sterility. This is how I spoke about Maes's abstract linoleum-cuts in number 11-12 (September 1922) of *Het Overzicht*: "As in the case of Peeters the third dimension is a result of the unity of the other two in the variations of their themes of expression. His art is fresher, more alive, but less severe and less varied than Peeters's. Roughly weighed, Maes has more joy, more youth than Peeters whose generally sombre and static rhythm shows more maturity. They differ in specific value, not in weight."



12.  
Karel MAES  
Lino, 1923, 12 x 8.  
Private collection.

(1) To these can be added some of the illustrations in black and white that the sculptor Oscar Jaspers did for « Bezette Stad », by Paul van Ostaïjen, published in 1921

I have already said that there is no way of resuscitating the past, that it is sufficiently present in its



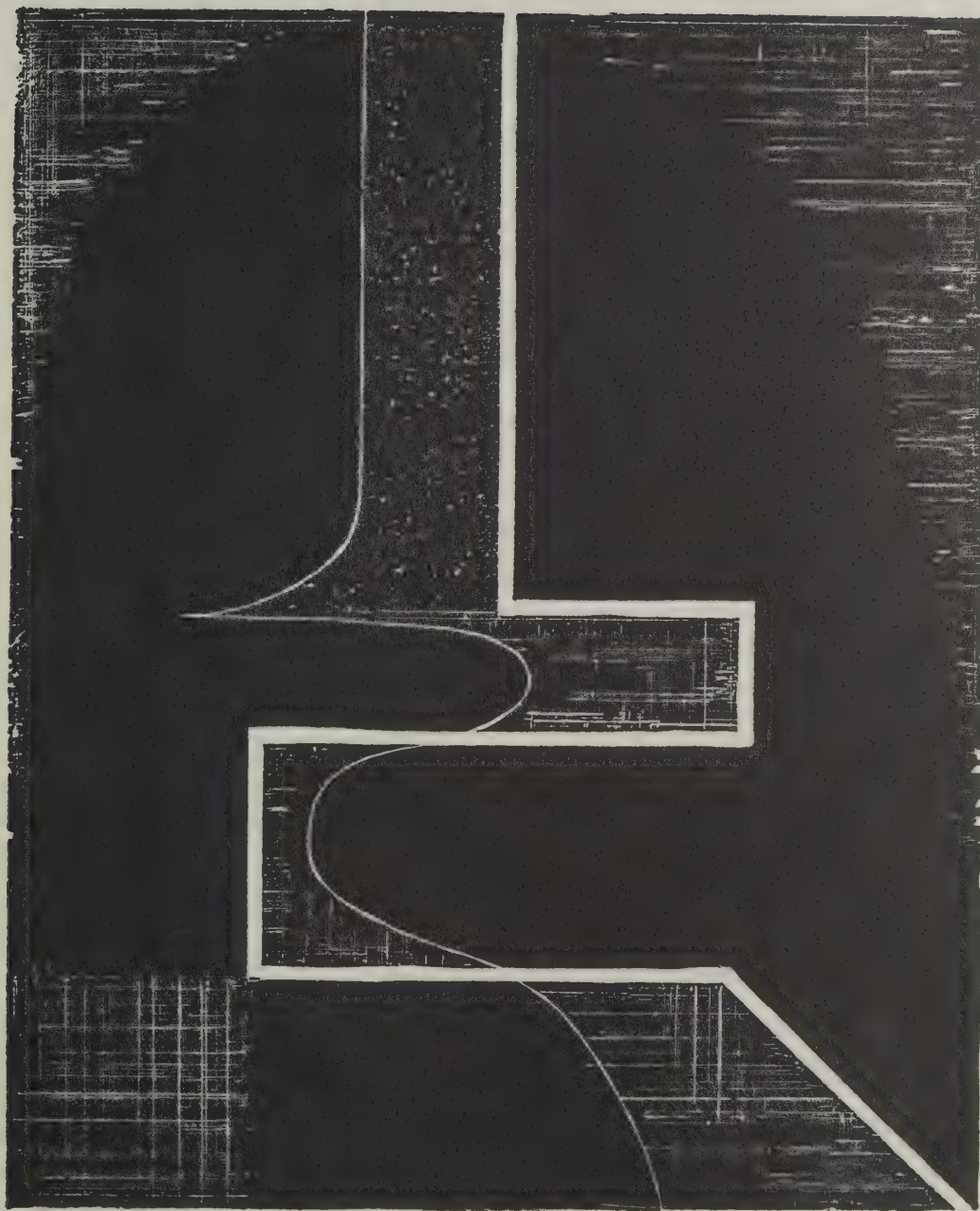


13.  
Jozef PEETERS  
Composition, 1922, 65 x 50, water-color.  
M.S. collection, Paris.



14.  
Victor DELHEZ  
Two half circles  
S 225 series, about 1923  
23 x 12, wood-cut.  
Private collect. Antwerp.





15.  
Victor DELHEZ  
Musicals VII, S 232 series, about 1923  
19 x 15, wood-cut.  
Private collection, Antwerp.

works. Some of these, however, have a strange virtue, which is that of living more in the future than in the time in which they are born. Peeters's and Maes's linoleum-cuts are of this nature. Little noticed, often greeted with indifferent shrugs in 1921, they have become very much up-to-date at the present writing. An album of seventeen engravings by Peeters done between 1920 and 1925 and recently published reveals in a disconcertingly irrefutable way the strength and delicacy combined in these works of slight pretention (1). Time, which often plays tricks, has strangely enhanced them without in the least ageing them. They testify to a remarkable sense of form to which the practical aim is no obstacle. The cover of a review, an invitation to a recital, a poster, all in letters, are treated as fugues and counterpoints with an extraordinary virtuosity while at the same time remaining perfectly legible.

May these plates, then, live again, in their power allied to simplicity, and may they take the place they deserve to have in the history of abstract art !

IT IS TIME TO SAY A WORD of Victor Servranckx. Little had been heard of him before 1922, although he had participated in several exhibitions (he was to have his first important exhibition, in Brussels, in 1924). He was getting ready, in those days, to play the major role he was to assume in the annals of abstract art in Belgium. In 1921, he had executed an abstract spherical sculpture, *The Egg in the Egg*, which has been for a long time in the Grenoble Museum. It is, I believe, one of the first abstract works to have entered a State Museum. But as early as 1919 Servranckx had painted wholly abstract paintings, with geometric forms combined with baroque forms, at times even with non-formal effusions.

1923 was a good year for the painter. This was the year in which were produced *The Reign of polished steel* and the whole series entitled *Exaltation of machinism*, rigorous and clean-cut works in which a severe order is obtained by a complex harmony of forms, all derived from the world of technics. They are close in

spirit to what Léger painted in 1919 and 1920. Perhaps a little drier. A great number of other paintings, executed in an elementary style composed of curves and straight lines blending in a kind of give and take, belong to this same year 1923. In several of these canvases the painter comes appreciably close to the pure horizontal-vertical rhythm, without ever wholly giving in to it. Here too neo-plasticism had sowed the seed of its preoccupation with pure form which was henceforth inevitable.

Servranckx's work, in the course of the years, was to develop on two planes, the figurative and the abstract. In abstraction itself his work splits into an open geometric tendency and another, very different, which could be called baroque or closed. There is even a grotesque or surrealist tendency to be accounted for. This painter's case, it can readily be seen, is not a simple one.

Each of these tendencies was to dominate by turns, but the others were never abandoned. In the catalogues of his exhibitions very sober geometric figures, violent whirling forms, figurative drawings in an obviously erotic vein, delirious inventions which the painter explores to the last irritating detail can be seen side by side. So that what we have is a devotee of pure form, a surrealist jobber and a Flemish anecdotist. All in one and all in abundance. In recent years it is again the pure plastician who has had his say. This has afforded a fine series of works marked by a serene forcefulness, generally composed of horizontal and vertical lines crossing in the lower part of the canvas to create a checked pattern, with above it a disk or a half-disk. The colors are bold with subdued harmonies.

The man is like his excessively rich work. One cannot approach Servranckx without being submerged by the verbal flow of his temperament.

The Fleming is someone who overflows. You will recognize him by his natural generosity, by his tenacity, by his over-abundance. In the case of some, often small of build, all muscle, the dynamic tension is such that they resemble compressed volcanoes. Heaven help the game that exposes itself to them to liberate them of their charge ! For that matter, they never liberate themselves, for the more they talk the more heated they become, the more they burn. Even their

(1) « Jozef Peeters, dix-sept linogravures », Ed. Mesure, Paris 1962. Cf. Bibliography.





16.  
Victor SERVranckx  
Opus 38, 1921, 22 x 28, oil on linen.  
Private collection.



17.  
Victor SERVRANCKX  
Opus 46, 1923  
146 x 92, oil on linen.  
Private collection.

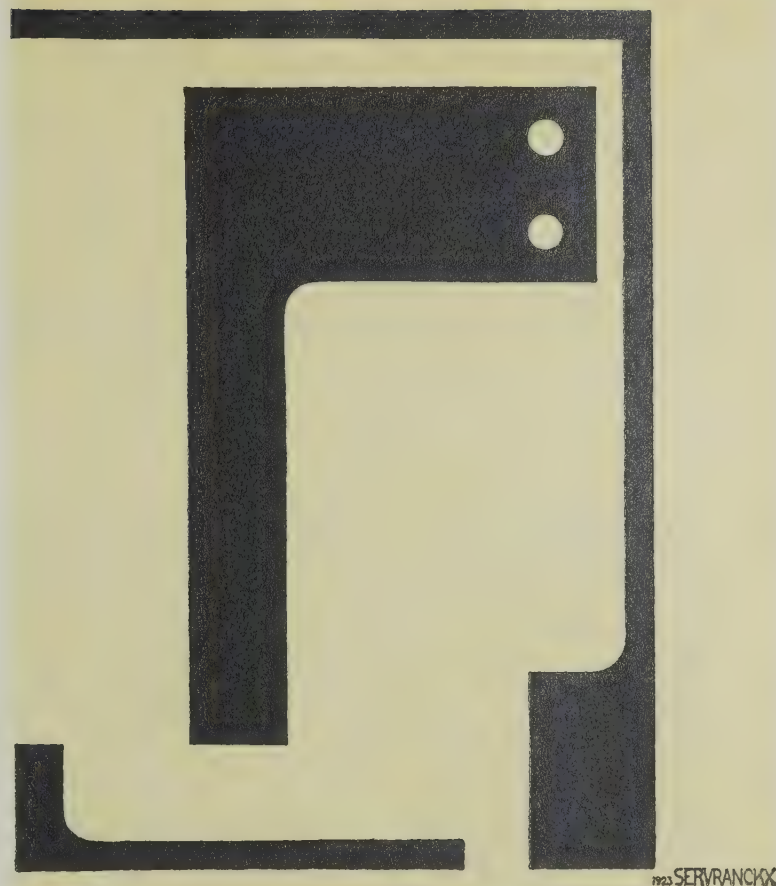


monologue oppresses them. Servranckx, Peeters and Vantongerloo, to different degrees, belong to this type. Short and thick-set colossuses. Filled with themselves to the point of overflowing. These remarks imply no human criticism; perhaps they make it possible to begin to explain the difficulties certain artists can come up against in social relations and to shed light on some failures. For if the search for an attentive ear favors the establishment of such relations, eruptiveness immediately strains them, threatens to break them. Thus the natural generosity of these Flemings may become asocial through monomania concentrated on the self.

This definition, like all definitions, can of course be disputed. It is clear that there are other Flemish characters. There is even a taciturn Fleming, of aphasic and colorless mien. Like man, according to Montaigne, every people is multiple and contradictory. There are ten types of Frenchmen, all equally characteristic. But one may propose one of these types as coming closest to defining the whole or the major tendency of a nation. So I should say of the Frenchman that he conceptualizes and rationalizes everything, of the German that he makes a collection of sentiments, of the Italian that he is skeptical to the point of superstition, of the American that he builds up a sense of security for himself by means of figures, of the Fleming that he overflows.

To come back to Servranckx, some affirm, others deny, that the painter exhibited abstract works in Brussels, in 1917. Peeters, in the period of our collaboration, always protested against this claim, alleging the absence of conclusive documentary proof. I see no reason to mistrust what Servranckx then remembered of that period. Perhaps he gave to the term "abstract" a broader definition than Peeters did. As we can see, this quarrel over priorities, which was to assume such an acute form in Paris and elsewhere, already manifested itself in 1923.

However this may be, it does seem that both Peeters and Servranckx were beaten by Vantongerloo, as to whom the date of 1917 is undisputed; Vantongerloo, in turn, was beaten by Lacasse and by Kandinsky; these, in turn, by Degas. Abstract monotypes by this painter were exhibited at the Salon des Réalités Nouvelles in 1954. They dated from 1885!



18.

Victor SERVVRANCKX  
Opus 59, 1923, 70 x 58, oil on linen.  
The artist collection.

IN THE FALL OF 1922 I invited Peeters to co-edit *Het Overzicht* and in December, equipped with numbers 13 and 14, whose covers had been engraved respectively by Peeters and Maes, we made the trip to Berlin, with Mrs. Peeters accompanying us. Our first visit was to Herwarth Walden, editor of the review and director of the Gallery *Der Sturm*, with whom we were subsequently to have regular relations. In early 1924 the famous review, which had launched and in part created the German expressionist movement, was to publish a number devoted to the new art and the new literature in Flanders. A linoleum-cut by Peeters adorned the cover.

After one or two nights in a hotel we rented at a ridiculous price (millions of inflation-marks equalled a few Belgian centimes) a vast furnished apartment on

the corner of Grohlmannstrasse and Kurfürstendam. The Peeters's had a sumptuous drawing-room. I had a room with a *loggia* overlooking the street and a smoking-room. So, comfortably settled in the heart of Berlin, we were swept up in a round of visits in the city and its suburbs. Introduced by Walden and by the sculptor Rudolf Belling whose wife directed a ballet school, we were invited everywhere. The flood of Russian refugee artists, the developments of dadaism and of expressionism, the new turn that the Weimar Bauhaus took at that time, the presence of numerous foreigners — like ourselves — for whom the collapse of the mark was a boon, all this imparted an exceptional animation to Berlin intellectual circles during this period. Even the futurists had established a *Casa futurista* in Berlin, directed by the poet Ruggiero Vasari. During our stay Marinetti and Prampolini, with whom we had already corresponded, came on a visit. I shall never forget a lecture by Marinetti, in the tiny hall of the Casa, jammed with people. The leader of the futurist movement, who spoke in French, attacked Goethe with his usual devil-may-careness, without any regard for his German auditors, and advocated the dynamic, the strenuous life ("unto each day, unto each hour, its new sensation"): This led to a brief but very odd discussion between Marinetti and myself which brought out an irreducible antagonism which I later called *the style* and *the cry*.

We made the acquaintance of Adolf Behne, a critic then highly esteemed, Walter Gropius, Paul Westheim, editor of *Das Kunstblatt*, the editors Cassirer and Nierendorf, Archipenko, Buchholz, Moholy-Nagy, Gabo and many others whose names today raise few echoes. With the Luckhardt brothers we visited all job sites of the *Neusiedlungen* and from Christmas to New Year's day there was not an evening that passed without some important encounter in the receptions that followed one upon the other. The streets of Berlin were rather dreary, their atmosphere was in sharp contrast to the climate of the bourgeois evenings in which a cosmopolitan and polyglot society met. We also went to the Russian cabaret *Der Blaue Vogel*, the first of a type which was quickly to spread in Europe. A year later I found its imitation in Amsterdam; three years later, Nikita Balieff created the *Chauve-Souris* in Paris, which was only a pale copy of the Berlin cabaret. And we saw

Anna Pavlova dance in a theater on Friedrichstrasse, in a performance impressive for its precision and grace.

I came back to Antwerp, a few days after the Peeters's, bursting with ideas, my ears humming. In all the buzz of Berlin talk, what had echoed most often in my ears was the word *Paris*. The city was mentioned in every conversation, it was the key to all situations. How much closer Paris seemed to Berlin than to Antwerp! And how different from what it had appeared through Peeters's accounts! I made my decision. One more issue of the review, this time with a cover by Servranckx, and I was off.

PARIS WAS INDEED DIFFERENT from Berlin. The feverish life, the density, above all the diversity, made Berlin look very pale, and my native town, with all that the port contributed to it, appeared to me like a lovely indolent city in a realm where time no longer counted. Here was life, and therefore truth, and therefore beauty. I immersed myself in it with the serene intoxication that happiness gives. Anonymity in the middle of this human melting-pot, which had no limits, appeared to me the most bracing thing in the world. In Antwerp there was not a café terrace where I would not see a familiar face. I had at last thrown off this yoke. For a week I did nothing but explore the Paris streets. I felt at home as I had never felt in my own city. I was at the source whence all things had sprung.

When it occurred to me that there were painters to see, that I should not leave Paris without having paid a few visits, there was an abrupt break in the initial enchantment. But it was not at all the chore that I had anticipated. Here too I found life, warmth, and everywhere that indefinable flexibility that I had admired in the street, in the subway, and that might well be the seal of civilization itself: the intimate union of urbanity and freedom.

In Peeters's footsteps, I paid visits to Léger, to Gleizes, to Mondrian. And I looked in vain for that impure and scheming atmosphere that my colleague had put me on my guard against. My strongest impressions were Mondrian's studio, behind the Montparnasse Station, in a building which has now been torn down, and the apartment of the Delaunays, at 19 Boulevard Malesherbes,



two high places of the art of this century with which I was to become very familiar in the years to follow. I can still see the taxi into which Ivan Goll and Joseph Delteil pushed me to take me by force to their friend Delaunay, and my surprise, on reaching the fifth story, before the *Windows open on the city* beside the very window from which the view looked out over the city to the Eiffel Tower.

At Mondrian's, it was the man who made a deep impression on me, a quality of silence in the man and in the work, an obvious greatness in the work and in the man. Despite the difference in age, we were soon to become fast friends. He accorded to my poems, to

my small writings of the period, an attention I had never obtained in Antwerp. He spoke to me about them in few words which had the weight of many. His ascetic studio in the heart of the most bustling city in the world was such an abrupt contrast that an initial visit generally had to be devoted to absorbing the shock. Metaphysics at home in the heart of the whirlwind.

I likewise saw Kupka, Larionov, Brancusi, Ozenfant, Juan Gris, Severini and the poets Paul Dermée, Céline Arnaud, Tzara, Huidobro, Crevel, Nicolas Beauduin, Iliasz. I saw nothing corrupt in the course of all these encounters. Never did I come up against coldness, or indifference.



19.  
Paul JOOSTENS  
Collage, 1922, 26 x 37.  
Toussaint collection, Brussels.

Antwerp did not see me again for long. Only for the length of time needed to bring out number 16, with a cover engraved by Moholy-Nagy, and I was again in Paris. Number 17 would have a cover by Delaunay.

I WAS TO HAVE MUCH CLOSER CONTACT, that year, with Paul Joostens, of whom I had seen very little before. The love of Paris brought us together. A year later, in fact, he was to marry, with all the proper formalities, at the town-hall of Levallois-Perret, an authentic Parisian girl who spoke a language composed of shrill yelps and a curious baby jargon. He had picked her up in an Antwerp house where people drink and dance. I was the groom's witness at the somewhat burlesque wedding and it gave me the idea for *Mariage filmé* (1).

Joostens was a kind of disillusioned enchanter, of uncertain humor and a bit of a poltroon. When a man of this nature becomes involved with people of small scruple, the chances are that he will be easily hoodwinked. In the present case, in his pantomime with Petit Mado — this was the name of the Parisian girl to whom he had plighted his troth in Levallois — he played the role of a ninepin, she that of the bowler. He was so ill-assured in the face of this marriage that it seemed to me that a mere touch would knock it over. This painter, moreover, was also a poet — he had just published *Salopes* and was to go on writing to the end of his life — and what is more vulnerable than a poet when confronted by these ladies with very concrete ideas? Orpheus attracts them and they knock him to pieces. Perhaps his unpublished writings would some day avenge him. Symbolically, for death had supervened. In these matters, death always exercises the right of precedence. And justice is satisfied: no gnashing of teeth and many smiles.

But Joostens, during the years 1920-1923, was a bold painter. He was in the very vanguard of the most advanced European art. He belonged to the Antwerp group *Ça ira !*, the liveliest and the best informed of the Belgian literary reviews of the period. It had published in 1921 a number devoted to dadaism with the collaboration of Paul Eluard, Pierre Albert-Birot, Pierre de Massot, Clément Pansaers, Benjamin Péret, Ezra Pound, Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes, Francis Picabia.

(1) The text of this was to become the main contribution in the last number of « Het Overzicht ».

In 1922, it published an article by van Doesburg on *De Stijl*. It sometimes illustrated its issues with abstract wood-cuts by Peeters, Maes, Kassak, Flouquet, reproductions of works by van Doesburg, Vantongerloo. It was a very advanced group which shut its doors to nothing new.

From expressionist sensualism Joostens turned, in 1920 and 1921, to a flexible cubism full of unexpected accents, which logically led to abstraction (*La Maison de Landru*). The collage-cut-outs that he subsequently made (1922) are all abstract. There is an obvious kinship between these and Kurt Schwitters's collages of the same period. In 1922 and 1923, Joostens constructed a great number of *Objects*, assemblages of the most incongruous materials, in which humor is very much in evidence. Then he reverted to minor figurative pleasures, painting, drawing in cafés, in dance halls, even in motion picture theaters, also writing a great



20.  
Karel MAES  
Lino, 1919, 8 1/2 x 6.  
Private collection.

deal (in 1927, in the *Documents Internationaux de* entitled *Règle de Jeu*). Sensitive rather than forceful, Joostens would let himself be penetrated by the local color and the events of every day without offering them any resistance. A few years later I was to find him





21.  
Félix DE BOECK  
Composition 13, 1921  
72 x 60, oil on wood.  
Private collection.



22.  
Pierre-Louis FLOUQUET  
Painting 37, 1925, 112 x 100, oil on linen.  
Pierre Bourgeois collection, Brussels.



literally under the spell of ancient Flemish painting. He reproduced it in his own special climate, blending with it the visions of an erotomaniac who frequented the most special spots in the port. His art then completely leaves the framework of this book until, thirty years later, in a series of very dense collages, crowded to the point of choking, he was to find a renewed interest in abstraction.

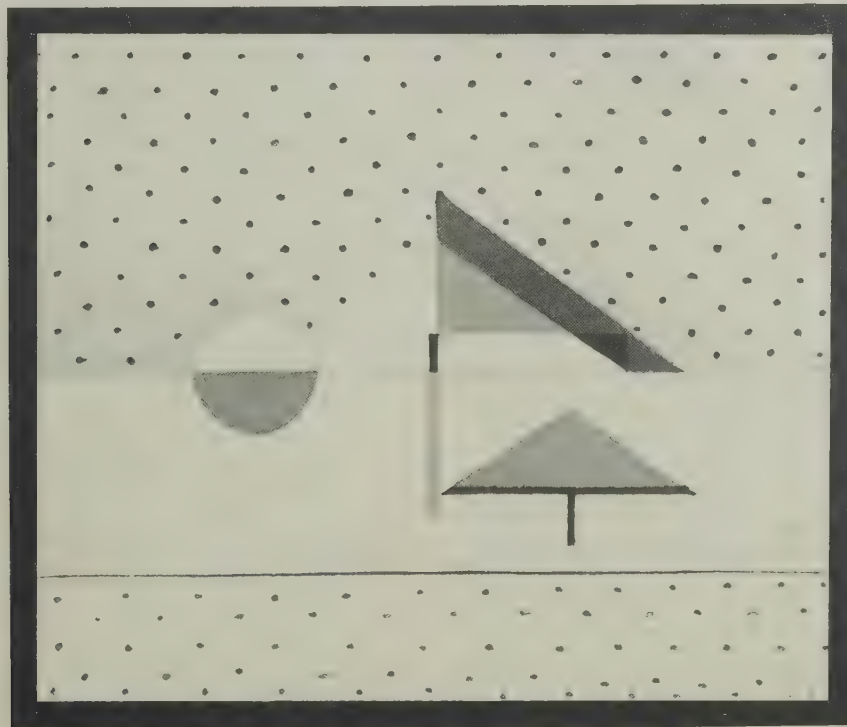
I quote the following from a letter of Joostens's written in late 1926: "My artistic career ends in 1923. Since then I survive myself. The race is over and there is no longer any use running, for you always start too late." In June 1926: "Overwhelmed with clairvoyant laziness, I would not dream of going in for novelty. Each naked day is a perfect day." In early 1926 I read in one of his letters that he has "abandoned cubism and all -isms", that his "only model and fatherly provider is the great and unique Memling. At this game", he goes on to say, "you break your head against the bronze wall."

The Flemish primitive drowned in an atmosphere of nihilism or of morbid eroticism combined to form a singular mystic marriage. The true key to this strange case

is that Joostens remained a dadaist all his life. An Antwerpian dadaist. Quite a few things remain to be discovered in his heritage.

IN BRUSSELS, SEPT ARTS, which appeared in the form of a journal, gathered round it the young forces of painting, poetry and architecture. It was edited by the Bourgeois brothers — Pierre, the poet, Victor, the architect — and Pierre-Louis Flouquet. The last had published in 1922, under the insignia of *Ça ira !*, a collection of nine very attractive linoleum-cuts which were on the vague borderline between the abstract and the figurative. He painted constructions and very simplified outlines of men or trees. In his purely abstract works his style was rather close to that of Servranckx. He liked shadows and velvety half-tints.

Flouquet executed stained-glass windows conceived in horizontal and vertical rhythms in the *Cité Moderne* which Victor Bourgeois built in 1923 at Berchem-Sainte-Agathe, a suburb of Brussels. It was an honest, and at



23.  
Félix DE BOECK  
Drawing, 1923, 18 x 21  
pen and China ink.  
M.S. collection, Paris

the time very courageous, application of the principles of *De Stijl*. He also painted great architectonic canvases (I reproduced two of these in *Documents Internationaux de l'Esprit Nouveau*) and put an end to this activity in about 1928 in order to devote himself to literature and become a kind of officer of world poetry.

Besides Flouquet and Servranckx, Brussels had a painter of undeniable originality. This was Felix de Boeck. He lived, and still lives, in Drogenbos on the southern outskirts. But the moral distance between the city and himself was infinitely great. Imagine a painter who was an authentic peasant, having an orchard and animals, living on his small plot of land, proud of his condition. When you would be received you would have put before you a bacon omelet and a glass of milk. The paintings were exhibited in the midst of the chickens in the farmyard.

This painting, treated in colored lines or in planes with beveled glints, at times abstract, at times figurative, was the painting of a rustic Jacques Villon. A landscape would be reduced to a few elementary geometric signs, a sea wave to a few curves. A child's face, a pigeon, became pretexts for studied excisions in the search for light. A straight line continued by dots in a glow of colors was the figure that the painter gave to the idea of growth. Certain paintings were composed of nothing but a few rectilinear strokes, clumsily geometrical. They are the ones which, in my opinion, remain the most valid. I see in them more real naïveté than in the figurative or semi-figurative works and their innocence is entire.

HALFWAY BETWEEN ANTWERP AND BRUSSELS, in the calm little Flemish town of Malines, with its incomparable bell-tower, there was at that time another presence. Prosper De Troyer kept a paint shop and used the paints to paint powerful and pure constructivist works. He derived from fauvism. In his previous works the influence of Matisse is recognizable. Then he passed through a futurist phase of which a magnificent painting remains: *The Festival*. In 1922, in his back-shop, all the Paris art reviews and a few others were to be found.

How could so well-informed a man have made an about-face and abandoned the art of his time? Was it, perhaps, that he was too well-informed? The wind, in Flanders, had begun to blow in an altogether different direction. An enormous undertaking had been launched in Brussels with the *Le Centaure* Gallery and the review *Sélection*, to launch Flemish expressionism, in other words the painters of Ghent and the village of Laethem-Saint-Martin. The rôle that surrealism was to play in Paris a few years later was to be assumed by the second group of Laethem for Flanders: that of a screen cutting the path of the evolution of art and attracting all eyes. With this difference, that surrealism, being a primarily literary movement, its painters drowned themselves in anecdote and subtle allusion, whereas those of Laethem were painters first of all and were to remain so without any ambiguity. I still have great admiration for them, and for their own ancestor, Ensor.

The name of Permeke is now known throughout the world, and that of Van den Berghe almost as well. I want to draw attention here to the fact that there are a few paintings by Permeke which are close to abstraction. Certain *Stables*, certain *Seascapes* are painted with such spirit that the subject is practically destroyed for the sole benefit of pure painting. Emile Langui has noted down a remark by Permeke which I consider significant: "*We paint, when all is said and done, with our eyes shut.*" The temptation of abstraction — unavowed, to be sure — is often manifest in his work. But he was seldom so close to it as in certain nearly white canvases which he painted in England during the first world war. The one reproduced here is typical. One need merely remove the figure in the upper part of the painting or deform it imperceptibly to make of this work a strange forerunner of thousands of abstract paintings of our time.

It would of course be absurd to blame the Flemish expressionists and surrealists for having diverted attention from abstract painting: it was up to the latter to be strong, to be conscious of the value which it incarnated in the century, to hold firm even amid the general coldness.

Despite this rebirth of an art having a national character, we, in *Het Overzicht*, went further and further in the direction of universalism and took note of the





24.  
Prosper DE TROYER  
Pure plastique, 1921  
92 x 120, oil on linen.  
Private collection.

local disaffection. In the last issues may be found articles on Robert Delaunay, the Bauhaus, the new poetry in Holland and in Brazil, constructivism, the new art in Poland, musical texts by Prokofiev, by Manuel de Falla, reproductions of works by Moholy-Nagy, Juan Gris, Kassak, Peri, Prampolini, Picasso, Laronov, Gontcharova, Kandinsky, together with those of Servranckx, De Boeck, Peeters, Maes, Joostens. Van Ostaijen, a Flemish national poet, rubbed elbows with Schwitters. But, precisely because of this internationalism, the days of Antwerp's presence in the art of the world were counted: the position was too exposed.

Joostens and De Troyer fell back into expressionism, and were not rewarded by its Flemish incense-bearers who, it seemed, had irrevocably ostracized them.

I LEFT ANTWERP FOR GOOD one March evening in 1925. I have not forgotten, I shall never forget, the silence and the melancholy of the station before the departure of the night train. At the other end of the line, tomorrow morning, I would rediscover the world of the living. Delaunay, Brancusi, Léger, Dermée, Goll, Huidobro, Mondrian... It is a list of the dead that I am drawing up. But they are every day more present in my life.

I made a brief appearance in Antwerp in about the middle of 1926. At the Hulstkamp Café my old friends greeted me exactly as though they had seen me the day before and the day before that. The great Flemish poet was good enough to get up from the table at which he played his game of dominos with two burghers of the town every evening, at five o'clock. He held out two fingers to me, as he always did, and sat down again without a word. No one showed me a friendly face. They didn't want to know that I had just come from Budapest, they didn't want to know that I had spent several months in Rome, that I had published two articles on *Avant-garde art in Belgium* in a big daily, that together with Marinetti, Balla, Prompolini, I had laid the foundations for a future World Congress of avant-garde art in Brussels and in Antwerp, that in Paris I had given a lecture at the *Camélión* on Flemish poetry with recitations of poems in Flemish and in French. They vegetated suavely in a colorless existence, having

no other ambition than to last. Of everything that our enthusiasms had built, nothing remained standing. It had been carried away like a sand-castle by the tide of indolence. Not even the memory of it, it seemed to me, would remain.

The next day I was back in Paris, in the feverish life, the ups and the downs, the insecurity, a certain physical and moral wretchedness. I preferred to go without dinner from time to time, and as I had never been too fond of dominos I did not too greatly feel the pinch of homesickness.

THREE YEARS LATER, Belgium saw me again for two months. A Paris publisher had asked me to write a book on the state of modern art in the country. He had offered me an advance against royalties which amply paid the expenses of my stay. I began my survey with Antwerp. The city which seven years before had been the springboard of the *avant-garde* in Belgium, had let itself sink irremediably into wellbeing. Abstract painting was totally extinct. Those who were still willing to remember it spoke of it as of an amusement taken up by not very serious people who wanted to pass themselves off as having set the Thames on fire.

I had better luck in Brussels, where I made the acquaintance of Jean-Jacques Gailliard. He had spent several years in Paris. He had obviously been affected by dadaism. I found in his work a spontaneous inventiveness which delighted me. He was doubtless, at that moment, the freest painter in the country. He had painted pictures composed entirely of spots or of clouds, which were like imaginary geographies. But a single painter did not suffice to give body to my book. There was nothing for it but to fall back on Laethem-Saint-Martin, on Ostend, where I went to look up Ensor and Permeke.

Wanting to write my book in the very climate of Flanders, I rented a room in the house of a shoemaker in Lissewege, a white-and-green village, in the polders between Bruges and the coast. I adapted myself so faithfully to circumstances that I was remarkably unfaithful to my universalist convictions. At the very time that I was preparing, with the Uruguayan painter Torrès-García, the foundations of *Cercle et Carré* (we were



now in 1929), I came to the conclusion that abstract art and the Flemish temperament were incompatible and in far too many words registered the victory of expressionism. It is interesting to note that the prejudice according to which the Fleming is unsuited for abstract art is a stubborn one. In 1961, in a text which accompanies an exhibition of the sculptor Roel d'Haese, in Paris, I read that "the Fleming is unshakably indifferent to abstract contradictions. Thus", the author of this essay continues, "a Fleming believes man cannot be wrenched away from art in its concrete, carnal presence" without which "art loses its *raison d'être*".

Several times delayed, *Un renouveau de la peinture en Belgique flamande* was to come off the press only in January 1932.

With its obvious defects, its sometimes cruel judgments, this book was nevertheless an exact reflection of the situation of art in Flanders. I might have written it with less acerbity, not with greater honesty. It was very badly received in Belgium and I was heavily slandered, especially in the Antwerp press. It was the reaction — the normal reaction, no doubt — to my frankness.

Almost at the same time the voluminous, authoritative work by the Haesaerts brothers, *Flandre*, appeared, which was going to make known the painters of the Flemish expressionist school. The roads to abstract art were definitively cut. Honor to the victors! But honor also to the vanquished, for in the matter of art there is no final victory. A new generation, with another perspective, can challenge everything. And even if this does not happen, do we not see historians remarkably gifted in the art of reviving what has never lived? Are there not excavations? Are there not gravediggers?

The brilliant Laethem group in its turn has become a thing of the past. It has become history, nothing but

history. As for abstract art, everywhere around us it is the living art. If in 1929 the conclusion was negative, in 1962 it has become positive: Flanders has authentic pioneers of abstract art. The force of circumstances, in other words, the world context of painting, has willed that figurative art should not have had the last word. We have been privileged to cast a glance beyond the wall that has stood for thirty-five years in the middle of the Flemish cultural life, blocking all universalist vocations. And we have found this abandoned region where Peeters, Maes, Servranckx, De Boeck, Flouquet, Joostens, De Troyer and a few others operated, to restore it, too, to history.

These artists and these works remain isolated, it is true, in the period extending from 1919 to 1925 and the new generation that appeared around 1949 did not use the former bases, the break having been too prolonged. This does not alter the fact that the time has come to remember those who came before, to tell the simple truth. The facts of the past can be neither impugned nor changed. Try as we may to suppress them, a moment comes when they spring up with the force of germination which bursts the hardest earth. And the belatedness of justice is succeeded by the loveliest of springtimes.

I have resorted a great deal to the first person in the preceding pages. It seems to me that any other form of language would have been false. When you have been an active witness of a period, can you describe it otherwise than by relating your reminiscences? History is based on documents and testimony. The documents, in the history with which we have been dealing, are the works. They can be studied at leisure in this book. As for my testimony, you have read it.



25.  
Anne BONNET  
Oriental consecration, 1955  
80 x 65, oil on linen.  
Mrs. Thuy collection, Brussels.



### III. - ABSTRACT PAINTING IN FLANDERS AND THE WALLOON PROVINCES TODAY

WE MUST NOW TURN OUR ATTENTION to those who in the past twelve or thirteen years have gone back to the abandoned road. After the first world war the impetus had come from the north, that is, from the Dutch *De Stijl*; this time it was to come from the south, that is, from Paris. Not at once, however. Painters have to find their own form in order to accede, through it and with it, to a more universal art. The book by Robert Delevoy, *La Jeune Peinture Belge*, which appeared in the fall of 1946, neither reproduces nor mentions any abstract work. And yet we find here, with numerous pictures, most of those who a few years later were to become the masters of Belgian abstract art : Louis Van Lint, Gaston Bertrand, Marc Mendelson, Luc Peire, Anne Bonnet, Antoine Mortier. This is because all these artists, quite aware of what was going on in Paris, were determined to move slowly. They were wise. I think it is always preferable for an abstract painter to have made his start in figuration. The art of

interpreting the object, the landscape, will teach him to forge a personality, to find his plastic themes, to decant them, and it is these themes, acquired in figuration, which will give him a surer foundation and autonomy in the abandonment of figuration itself. The painter who makes his start by going in directly for abstraction is in a quite different situation. Where can he find his inspiration if not in the painting of others ? Thus he runs a much greater risk of being an imitator or the plaything of fashion.

It was Jo Delahaut who first exhibited a characteristically abstract work in Brussels, in the fall of 1947. I was therefore in error when I wrote, in *L'Art abstrait, ses origines, ses premiers maîtres*, that "the only remaining defender of abstract art in Belgium was the spirited Victor Servranckx". In any case, Delahaut remained for several years the only young painter to commit himself resolutely to geometric abstraction as Herbin and Dewasne practiced it in Paris.

"After the liberation," the sculptor Anthoons told me, "we used to read *Les Lettres Françaises* every week for Léon Degand's articles." This Belgian critic was at the time the most brilliant commentator on abstract art in Paris. His chronicles on Delaunay, Magnelli, Herbin and many others were to bear fruit. Today these fruits are so multiple, so rich in variety, that it may be said that with the exception of the old surrealist bastion, the invasion of Belgium by abstract art is an accomplished fact.

About the year 1950 the passage from the figurative to the abstract was well-nigh inevitable for a young painter. Few artists escaped it. The most refractory were swept into it in spite of themselves and found themselves in the ranks of the "abstractionists" as if by surprise while they were still fighting this tendency in their words, in their writings. The phenomenon was to be observed in France, in Italy, in Germany, in the United States, in Switzerland and, since this is where we are, in Belgium. The reason is that there is a mime in every man. What we reject (what wounds our eyes) impresses itself in us with the same force as what we venerate (what caresses our eyes). At times what we call a weed takes the place, without our knowing it, of the good herb that we were cultivating with so much (good) conscience. What we took to be play has made us a father. The artist gladly adopts such a child, got by surprise. He discovers that one unknown is at times better in the matter of art than two certitudes. Why not play again? Thus is formed what will later be the style of a generation.

IT WOULD BE TEDIOUS TO DRAW UP the inventory of all the abstract painters in the running at the present time, and such an inventory, besides, would be quite incomplete as soon as it was printed. New ones spring forth every day in the towns and villages of Belgium and some whose work I have seen are extremely promising. At this very writing, I have just visited a group exhibition which calls itself "underground" and I found five painters there whose works struck me as remarkable from certain points of view. Quite unjustly, their names will not be mentioned here in order to avoid an even greater injustice toward so many others who have an equal right to existence.

The free countries of high culture and obvious industrial prosperity are witnessing at the present time a real rising tide of painting which is generally abstract. Speculation is obviously the prime cause of this. It is no secret that there is no field in which better investments have been made in recent times than in painting. A work by a master bought at a high price at a public sale regularly doubles its price after three or four years in another public sale.

Arthur Cravan wrote in 1914: "Speculators, buy paintings. What you pay two hundred francs for today will be worth ten thousand francs in ten years." He did not realize how right he was. Today everyone has got the idea and speculation is general. The galleries of Paris and New York launch painters one after another and collectors, as at a pigeon shoot, hit the bull's eye every time. Prices rise and that is all that is asked for. A consequence, which appears obvious, is that the deluge of painting rises exactly with prices. A deluge which in fact everything favors. What only yesterday was the sole apanage of a few big art galleries has become a universal process, and we see small regional shops, in Switzerland or elsewhere, buy the entire production of wholly unknown painters in a hit or miss way, on a sheer gamble, with the intention of reselling them at a high price, at the highest possible price, after a certain amount of boosting by means of illustrated catalogues and traveling exhibits, all expenses paid in advance.

There are still other reasons for this sudden multiplication of painters. The machine is giving man greater leisure. This leisure must be filled. Leisure, whatever anyone may believe, does not lead to idleness but to the discovery of new needs. Needs which are as much needs for expression as needs for enjoyment. It so happens that no form of self-expression is easier, more immediate, than painting; nor, for the public, is any enjoyment easier.

Literature requires a certain knowledge and affords the young little hope of success. The profession has long been overcrowded and the idiom is limited to the countries that speak it. Music is an even more uncertain outlet. Its language, to be sure, is universal, but its real life is dependent upon executants. Dancing requires a severe discipline and among those who go in for it few are chosen. As for sculpture, it is so heavy to carry!



Only painting is accessible to all, at almost no cost, without study, nor great effort, and the chances of making a career in it increase exactly at the rate of increase in the number of collectors.

Does this amount to saying that the drive of most of the young painters of today is a sordid craving for lucre? Certainly not. It is simply normal that impure elements should filter into the art that happens to have become, at one and the same time, the easiest to practice and the most lucrative. And the fact that those impure elements should disturb the well intentioned, and even the most serious workers in the art, is normal too.

Exhibitionism and all its extravagances having proved to be a paying proposition, a host of skilful amateurs has established itself on the stage of art and has transformed it into a music hall, a lowclass circus. Often the critics themselves are their accomplices: the panic fear of missing the last boat makes them put a premium on bounce. Some go out of their way to be hoodwinked. For having covered a certain number of canvases with uniform blue, all of them strictly identical, a young man not long ago was given the honors of a two-column article in the very serious newspaper *Le Monde*. It is true that he had taken the precaution to give himself out as being versed in Zen Buddhism. Another only had to go to the trouble of putting a few spots on a canvas to excite a Dominican monk to the point of causing him to write to a Paris critic to call his attention to the phenomenon. The same painter today exercises his talents by assembling sweepings which he exhibits in cages under glass. A preacher in the Saint-Etienne Cathedral in Vienne writes prefaces for and protects the most extravagant painters and finds in their morbid strangenesses substance for his pessimistic theology. In connection with a long-haired young woman he writes triumphantly that her paintings have surprised even the boldest among the painters of Saint-Germain-des-Prés. And a photograph accompanies the priest's text, showing the artist in the throes of her melancholy trances.

We have come to this. How are we to see clearly in a situation in which everything seems to conspire to bring about an irremediable degradation? Even very serious people see no way out except to go the others one better. So they break through the ceiling. Very fine. But there is a ceiling above which then has to be

broken through. And then another. Finally, a little late, they discover that all the broken-through ceilings are alike.

Then, if there is still a wise man left among the painters, we will want to go back to his foundations, he will want to find a hardness again, something on which to rest his foot, a certain value which is not necessarily theatrical nor even profitable. He will perhaps want to rediscover his self-respect, the trace of the truths that ripen slowly, that are not obvious, and, if he succeeds in going back so far, he will first encounter doubt.

IN BELGIUM THINGS ARE IN A LESS SORRY PASS than in other countries. In a less sorry pass, especially, than in Paris or New York. Yet all the tendencies of present-day abstract art are represented there by painters who appear to me to be of international level. I shall try, in the pages that follow, to give a panoramic view of what I found in the course of my investigation. But I am counting especially on my colleagues Bilcke, Sosset and Walravens to inform and guide the reader. They live in the country and have been the attentive witnesses of the annals of Belgian abstract art since its reappearance. The many sojourns I have made in the country to prepare this book have not sufficed, it will be realized, to see everything that deserved to be seen. May I therefore be forgiven the gaps in the report that follows.

I SHALL BEGIN BY COMMITTING THE IMPRUDENCE of annexing the Walloon provinces to Flanders. The painters of Liège are not going to like this very much, having for so long annexed themselves to France. But it is a fact that painting in Belgium is Flemish by definition. Let us leave it so as a matter of historical and geographical convenience, although abstract painting, by definition, is neither Belgian nor Flemish nor Walloon but universal.

Flanders is a linguistic, and therefore an ethnical and cultural reality. But when the graft of a universal language takes hold on this reality its dimension immediately changes. Flanders then becomes a province of a quite different country, of which France, Italy, Ger-

many, Switzerland, Holland and the United States are a few other provinces. All things considered, I find that none of these provinces is inferior today to the others. Abstract art, as I said at the beginning of this book, has brought about the same qualitative equalitarianism as technics.

Liège is a winding town, its boulevards accentuating the curves of the Meuse. Seen from a height it looks torn, rather black. Coal has long been its master. And this can be felt everywhere, except on the boulevard Frère-Orban, a pleasant island which happens to shelter one of the finest collections of modern painting that I know, that of Fernand Graindorge, which happens to be entirely turned toward France.

The eminent collector I have just named is also the great patron of the artistic destinies of the city. If Liège is worth more than a mass for certain Paris artists, and not the least of these, it is thanks to this enlightened Maecenas. Concrete signs of his intervention can likewise be observed in the city's Museum of Fine Art whose black and somewhat forbidding façade opens on very bright rooms where the Paris school — which, as everyone knows, is in no way a school — is represented as it is nowhere else in Belgium. A few examples can even be seen of the very latest comers pushed by some ultra-snob Paris art gallery. Didn't I tell you that Liège has to a certain extent annexed France? Paris, moreover, is so much closer than Brussels. As for Antwerp, let us not talk about it — it's at the other end of the earth.

In an upward-winding street, above the Museum, I paid a visit to Jean Rets who is a good representative of geometric painting of the international type. He is at times very close to Vasarely, especially in the last works. The painter is sincerely dumbfounded when he is told this. Mimicry is so natural to man that most artists are totally innocent of what to others may appear as plagiarism. Only a sophisticated stranger's eye can sometimes detect dangerous affinities. The critic can then, for once, play a useful role by indicating, with all the circumspection that usage dictates, if not the right road, at least the forbidden path.

I have seen previous works by Rets which owe nothing to others, in which the impersonal geometry reveals an unmistakable painter's personality in very sober linear rhythms.

Except for Sylvain Bronckaert and Plomteux who are actually in Liège, the other Liège painters who appear to me to be of some interest live in France. These include Francine Holley, Closon, Collignon, Lempereur-Haut (who was an early "abstractionist" and who is one of the stablest elements of the Salon des Réalités Nouvelles) and Engel-Pak.

Never has anyone seen a stranger figure than the last-named. Amiably frivolous, flabby, an inveterate voluptuary exuding an indefinable musty flavor of the Pigalle district in the early part of the century, he has lost none of his devil-maycareness and paints as he lives, with a natural maladroitness not devoid of freshness.

His name was once Engel-Rozier, he was a friend of Torrès-Garcia and contributed, in 1930, to the founding of Pierre-Louis Flouquet's *Journal des poètes*. In 1946, he illuminated Paul Eluard's *Objets des mots et des images* with lithographic lines and smudges which would make the most anarchic of the nonformalists of today turn green with envy. This linking of his name with a famous name was not to bring him the fame that might have been expected. Too simple to shine in a drawing-room, too unconventional to keep a firm hold on the reins of fame, Pak continued to lead a happy-go-lucky life, gently ironic, at the same time steadily keeping up his painting. Through the workings of a fate as whimsical as himself, he was to become the conservator of an unknown château in an unknown corner of France where what he mainly conserves is his works, his indolent self and his charming wife, who is a Madagascan, if I am not mistaken.

CAN GEORGES COLLIGNON, who has lived in Paris for some ten years, be considered to be the best painter from the Liège country? I believe he can. By sheer tenacity, destroying much, he has mastered a personal style, a little cluttered at times but one that owes nothing to his colleagues nor especially to the nonformal climate. I like to see a painter proceed slowly, go completely round his theme, attach himself to it, explore it in order to enrich it, to drain it, then discover that a subject is inexhaustible.

This theme, in Collignon's case, is composed of curvilinear movements that cross the canvas from end to





26.  
Georges COLLIGNON  
Composition, 1961  
70 x 52, gouache-collage.  
Private collection.



27.  
Jo DELAHAUT  
Proposition 1, 1961  
130 x 97, oil on linen.  
Private collection.



end or of straight and oblique lines that meet near the middle of the canvas in a kind of complex machine or nucleus. The great panel with prevailing reds that the painter executed for the Guillemins station, at Liège, belongs in this dense and colorful thematization.

Collignon, who is not yet forty at the present writing, is now discovering the virtue of dull tones in a series of very fine collages. Without realizing it, he is harking back to cubism, to cubism's finest moments, along an abstract path.

The fact of lending an ear to the sirens of love, of letting oneself be guided by certain sources of the art of this century, in no way prevents the painter, in this case, from pursuing a personal path, from developing his own style. The personality of a creative artist can, without doing violence to itself, graft itself on a tradition and derive from it new flavors having an authentic freshness.

Collignon lives in Aubervilliers, in the north of Paris. At the opposite end of town, on the gentle slopes of Vanves, I paid a visit to Francine Holley, who demonstrated her gifts long ago in constructed, very open compositions, but who now perhaps dreams more than she paints. I understand her perfectly since I have seen the splendid terrace from which she dominates Paris. She can imagine she sees her comrade and fellow-citizen over there, at the very peak of the horizon, beyond fifteen kilometers of roofs.

BRUSSELS HAS BECOME A PLEASANT TOWN with its new toboggans, a vast circle of ultra-modern games which surrounds, at a respectful distance, the old Grand-Place which is certainly the richest to be seen anywhere in the world and which many, many people do come and see. Rich, full-fleshed, Brabantine, bearing the same name as the heavy draught-horses. It is difficult, in Flanders, to conceive beauty without opulence. The meadows are lush, the wheat abundant. It takes a lot of everything to make a world, as the saying goes in France, which is an outstandingly diversified country; it takes a lot to live, they say in Flanders where economy is the art of not lacking superfluity.

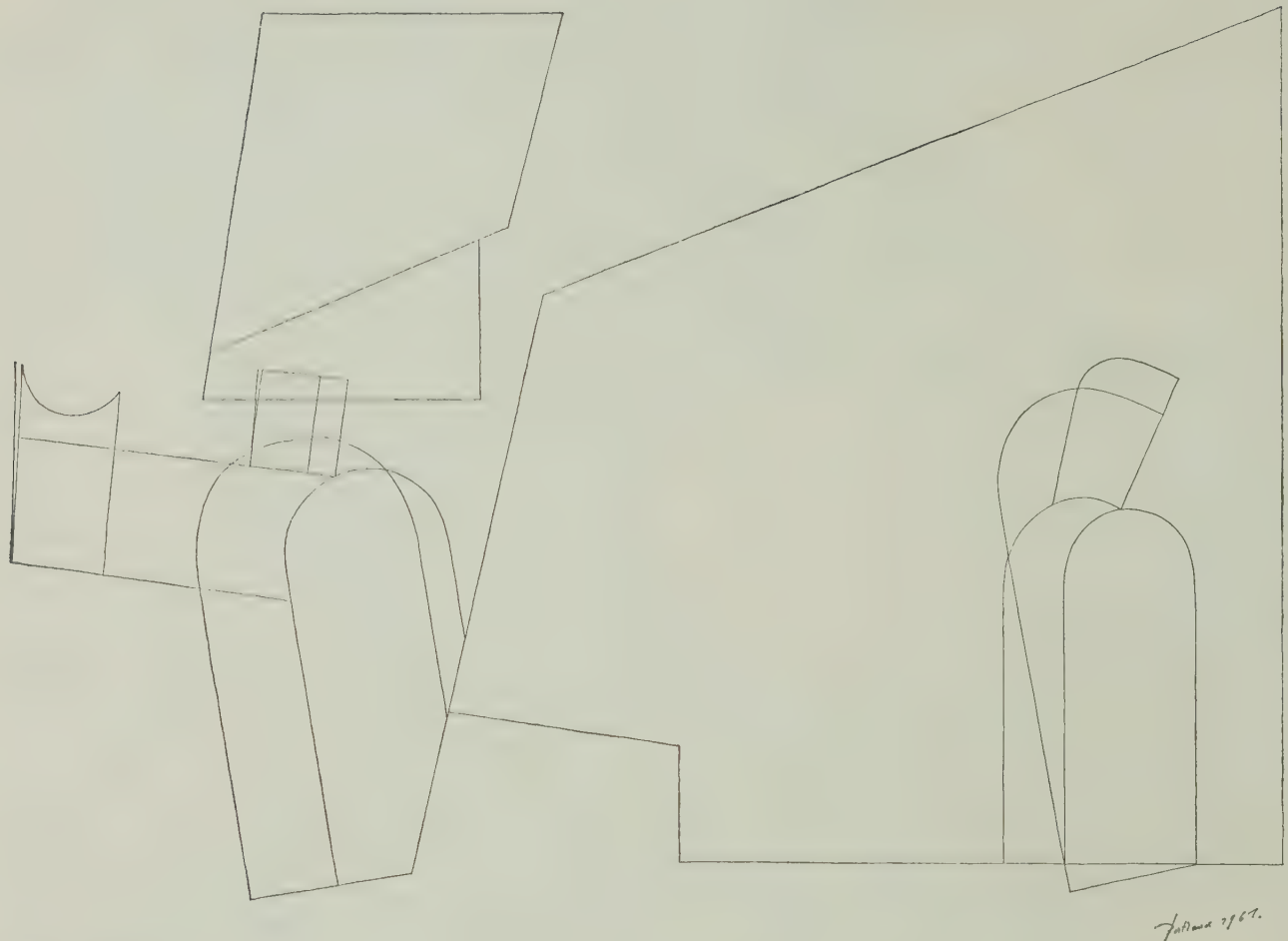
There were still poor people here in the time of my youth. There are hardly any left now, it seems. Not any

more than there are in Holland, for that matter, or in Germany or Switzerland. Prosperity has given the lie to the Bible: the poor ye have always with ye. And why should it not lie just a little? Why should it not perform that act of Christian humility? For above the Bible there is history, and above history the master of history. No one will shed a tear over the death of poverty, if he has known it, if he remembers. Without mentioning the fact that it can readily be resuscitated artificially. When it is deliberate it is much more attractive.

But here is Jo Delahaut, the first Belgian abstract painter after the break we have seen, in whom we encounter this rational renunciation to a high degree. He had obtained the seed of it neither from Peeters nor from Servranckx, his Belgian friends, but from the Frenchman Herbin to whom he was very close. We also find in him, over a period of several years, reminiscences of Dewasne, and later of Vasarely's black-and-whites. Delahaut is also a critic and an art historian, and it is in this capacity that he has paid tribute to those in this country who practiced abstract geometry between 1920 and 1925. It was he who, in collaboration with Maurits Bilcke, organized the first retrospective of the Belgian abstractionists of the heroic period at the Galerie Saint-Laurent in Brussels, in 1954. There was shown an excellent collection of works by Peeters, Servranckx, Maes, De Troyer, De Boeck, Joostens and Flouquet. This was an event in the annals of abstract art in Belgium, which in a sense prepared the bigger and more complete show that was held, five years later, at the Hessenhuis, in Antwerp.

We owe to Delahaut a fine series of very sober compositions, painted between 1952 and 1955, built from the multiplication of a single modulus in which the straight line and the curve harmonize. Order reigns here, and perfect calm, but also a certain concerted, almost childish play, which is restful and delights the eye.

In his recent works Delahaut cuts out the white plane of the painting by means of a single form in color treated in a flat tint. By means of the edges of this form he creates a very simple pattern of lines which composes dynamically. He thus has affinities with the American Ellsworth Kelly whose form is even more elementary.



28.  
Gaston BERTRAND  
Montmajour 1, 1961  
48 x 62 1/2, drawing, pen and China ink.  
Private collection.

This elementary quality, this extreme simplification, are also to be found in a series of wholly white reliefs, in which only the shadow draws a circle, a straight line. These works, almost all of them conceived symmetrical-ly, surprised me by their quiet splendor, their masterly lesson in economy.

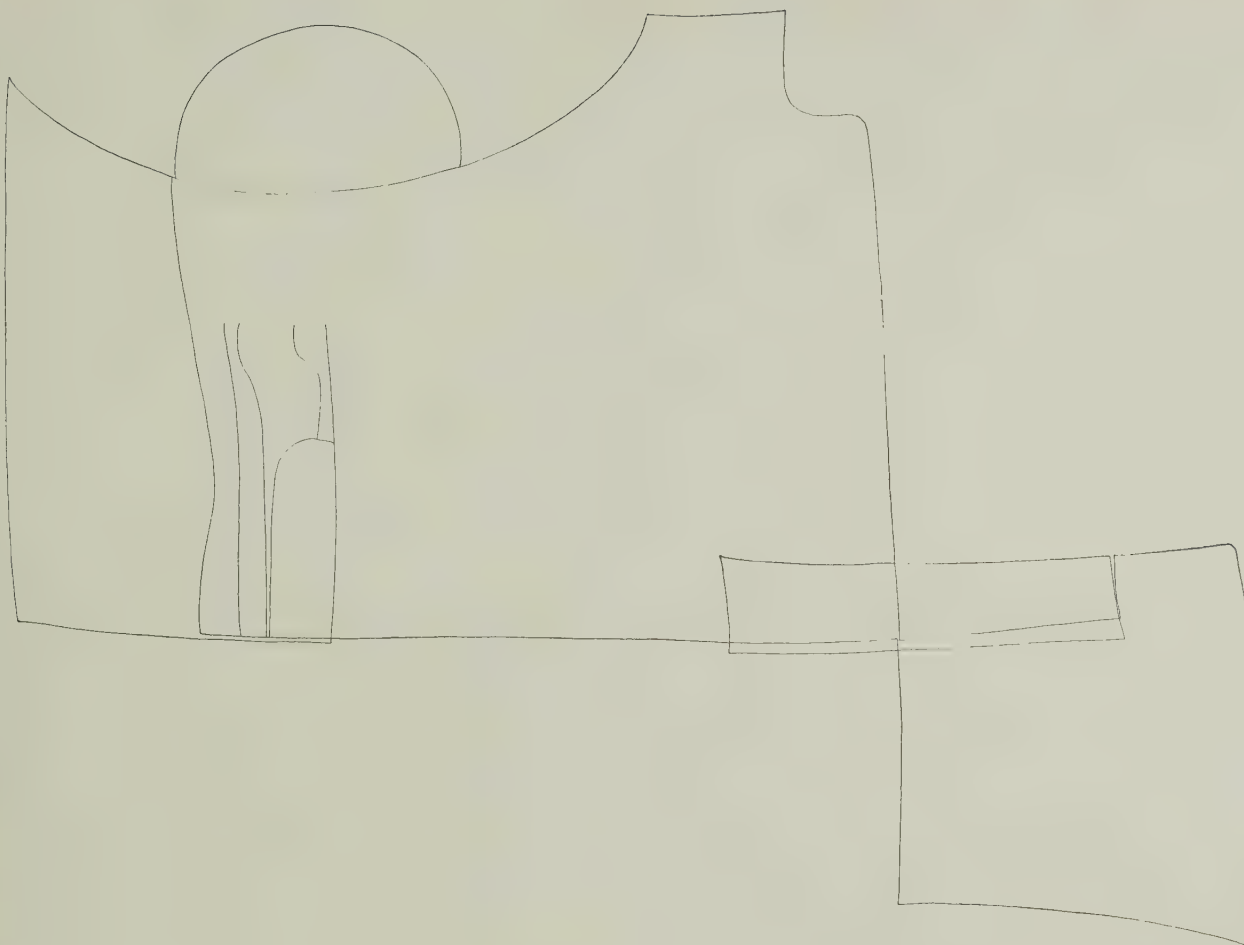
They surprised me for another reason. I myself, some years ago, had made some symmetrical drawings, knowing that this is a heresy in the eyes of many (we know that for Mondrian asymmetry is a sacrosanct law). A short time later I was to see that Aurélie Nemours was grappling with the same problem, and Jozef Albers in

America, and a few other painters scattered throughout the world. The parallelism suddenly extended in Belgium where I was to encounter it not only in the case of Jo Delahaut but also of Victor Noël and Daan Van Severen.

There is in symmetry, that is in the exact identity of the right and left sides of the painting (1), a kind of challenge because it looks straight ahead, and only straight ahead, refusing any alternative. It does not compromise. In short, it brazenly gives the lie to life

(1) The term is understood here in its restrictive mathematical sense, not in its etymological sense, which is « order », « measure ».





*Bertrand 1961*

29.

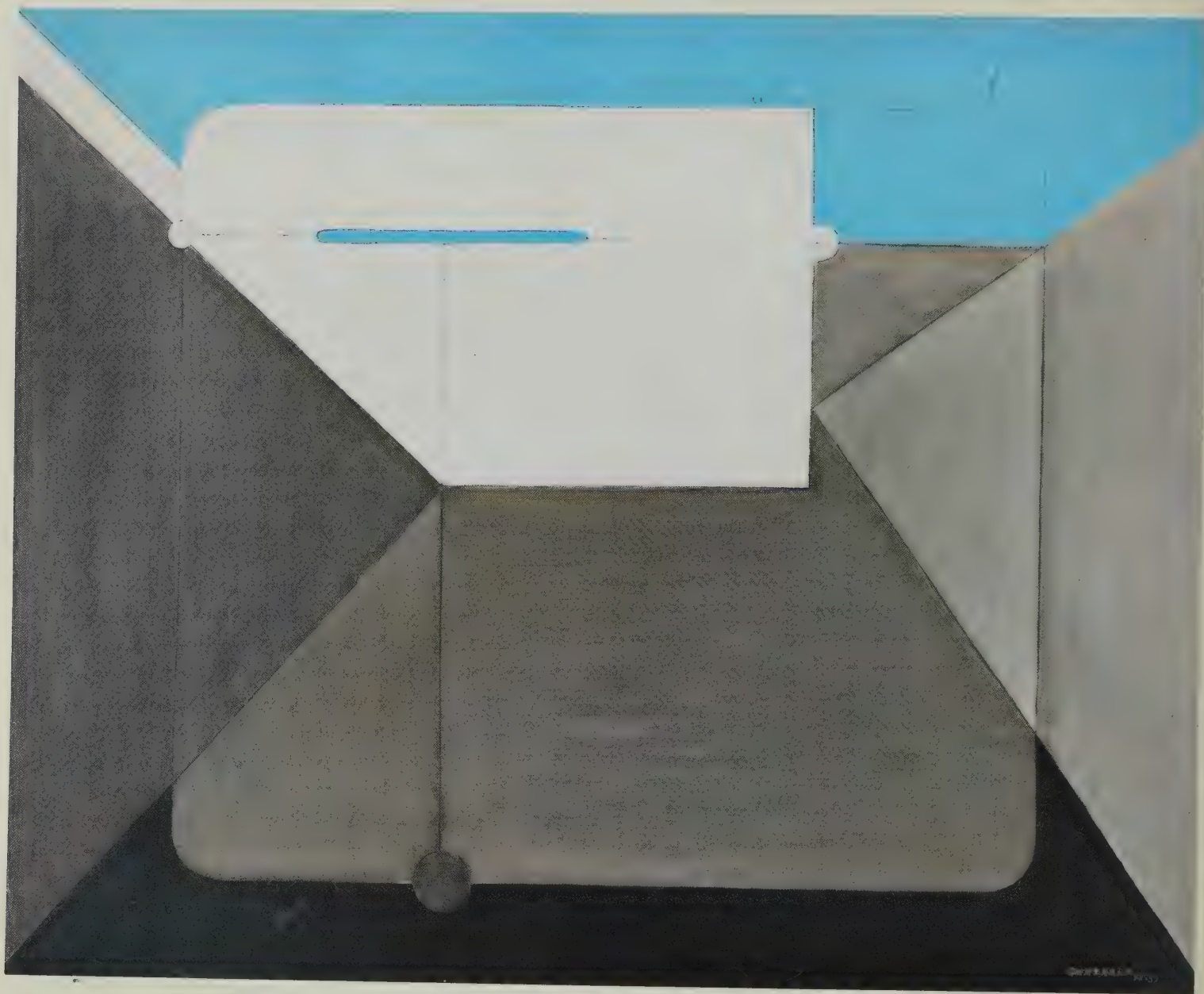
Gaston BERTRAND  
Montmajour 2, 1961  
46 x 58, drawing, pen and China ink.  
Private collection.

by affirming an immutability which denies everything that moves. Thus it opposes a totalitarian order to the aberrancy of the affectivities.

Strictly symmetrical works were rare in the past (1). Whence comes the sudden increase? Can it be because

(1) We may mention Arp's wood-cuts for the first edition (1919) of Hülsenbeck's « Fantastische Gebete », certain reliefs by Herbin (1917) and sculptures by Chauvin. Further on in this book will be found the reproduction of a small painting, of 1921, by Servranckx which is also symmetrical. The exceptional richness of this painter makes of his work a kind of encyclopaedia of the styles of this century. There is no problem whose neck Servranckx has not twisted, if I may be allowed the image, with assurance and delectation.

we have a need of fixedness? Do we need to anchor ourselves to an absolute law? to protect ourselves against being jolted? Do we seek the radical antidote to the general disintegration of forms of art? However this may be, we clearly see, once again, that a certain state of mind combined with a certain state of art gives rise, among various artists, isolated from one another, to the same problems and brings them to the same solution. It is therefore not true, despite appearances, that we work in a vacuum. We are all interdependent, even without knowing one another. Thus we have to



30.  
Gaston BERTRAND  
Composition No. 85, 1948-1952  
65 x 81, oil on linen.  
Private collection.



recognize that, in an occult sense, society exists. Seen from a great height, through some selecting screen, we probably appear as a group, moving like a flight of birds with the same passive unity.

GASTON BERTRAND OR SOPHISTICATED GEOMETRY is a title I should like to use. Among the painters who cultivate geometry and who are generally called constructivists I know none who does so with so free a spirit, with so much unconcern combined with preciosity. This way of proceeding without the slightest method annoys some people and I can understand them. Parts of the picture appear at times unfinished and this does not inspire confidence; but if the artist is satisfied with the state of his work, why should we not be so too? How many times I have asked an artist to leave a given canvas in the state in which I saw it in the studio, so as not to run the risk of breaking its charm! With the result that I was never heeded and that the charm was in each case broken! Bertrand would probably not listen to me any more than did the others, but it is my impression that in his case the charm would not be broken. He would finish it *otherwise* or leave it *otherwise* unfinished. This man, slightly clownish in appearance, with his funny moustache, has exceptionally fine antennae and they are all visible on the canvas. One need only know how to look at it, how to hear it. For these canvases sing. A music of simple, pre-polyphonic harmonies.

Certain paintings by Félix De Boeck done forty years ago come to my mind, and it may be that Bertrand found a seed or two in them. But there is here a degree of refinement that de Boeck could not even have begun to suspect, whereas in the older painter's work there is a true naïveté which is quite beyond Bertrand's reach. Thus between works which may at first sight look similar, there is, not forty years but a world of distance, as though they belonged to different civilizations.

Gaston Bertrand began as a portrait painter, an art which he still practices today. But his portraits are characters rather than persons, spectral analyses, in a sense, of characters, which reveal the stunted soul. For few are the souls that have not miscarried. Curiously enough, De Boeck also painted many portraits. And yet

he tends toward the analysis of spirits, showing the model in a variety of lightings, but he remains submissive to the model and stays descriptive, whereas Bertrand dominates the subject. And I see in him a certain propensity to cruelty which we do not find at all in the geometric work.

The motifs of these paintings, all their thematizations, are architectonic, and the titles they bear often announce it: *Forum Trajan, Florence, Plaza Padro...* But these titles are as far removed from the subject they name as Mondrian's *Place de la Concorde* or the *Broadway Boogie-Woogie*. However, Bertrand often draws from the architectonic motif itself, and he makes no secret of it. Thus he has made a great number of linear drawings which transpose details of the Medici Chapel in Florence in abstract compositions which show great delicacy of feeling. This painter's attitude to nature is very close to that of the Englishman Ben Nicholson.

Quite different is the attitude of Kurt Lewy who invests what we can call a classical geometry with his sole inventive faculty. The result is a work which is honest, at times monochrome, but about which there usually lingers something of the closed atmosphere of the studio. This painter's most successful achievements are enamels of small dimensions in which the subtle shades of color and the happy proportions reveal a timid, infinitely delicate nature.

An equal modesty is conveyed by the work of Lismonde and an equal delicacy, although it limits itself to black and white. This draftsman is a poet whose free verse conceals the internal rhyme. No rigor is visible here, but there is an invisible rigor throughout, a great reserve sealed beneath an apparent fortuitousness. How far away we are from the gags, the leg-pulling, the mystifications that keep turning up in certain galleries! Here nothing hits you in the eye, there is nothing that can be used for a publicity stunt. You will come to me, Lismonde's drawings seem to say, if you are strong enough; but I live far away and I can be reached only on foot. Who still travels on foot?

VAN LINT, FOR ONE, TRAVELS ON FOOT, and it is over long country roads that he has reached his present painting which is nature transposed, superanimated,





31.

Jules LISMONDE

October, 1960

92 x 65, drawing with charcoal.

Private collection.



made much of, magnified with a Flemish voice which has taken on a Parisian accent.

Certain canvases remind us of those Danish gardens in which the flowers are in tight bunches fighting for the smallest space. Do they not choke one another? Perhaps, but this is only to the detriment of the grassy green, for the visible surface is a riot of color. As a matter of fact, when we review Van Lint's painting of the last seven or eight years we walk in a garden. A garden run wild whose paths are barely recognizable and full of cave-ins.

This painter, like Bertrand, remains deeply impressed by his travels and the parallel visual adventure. Both of them comment on them in the studio on their easels, but how differently! Sometimes they see the same

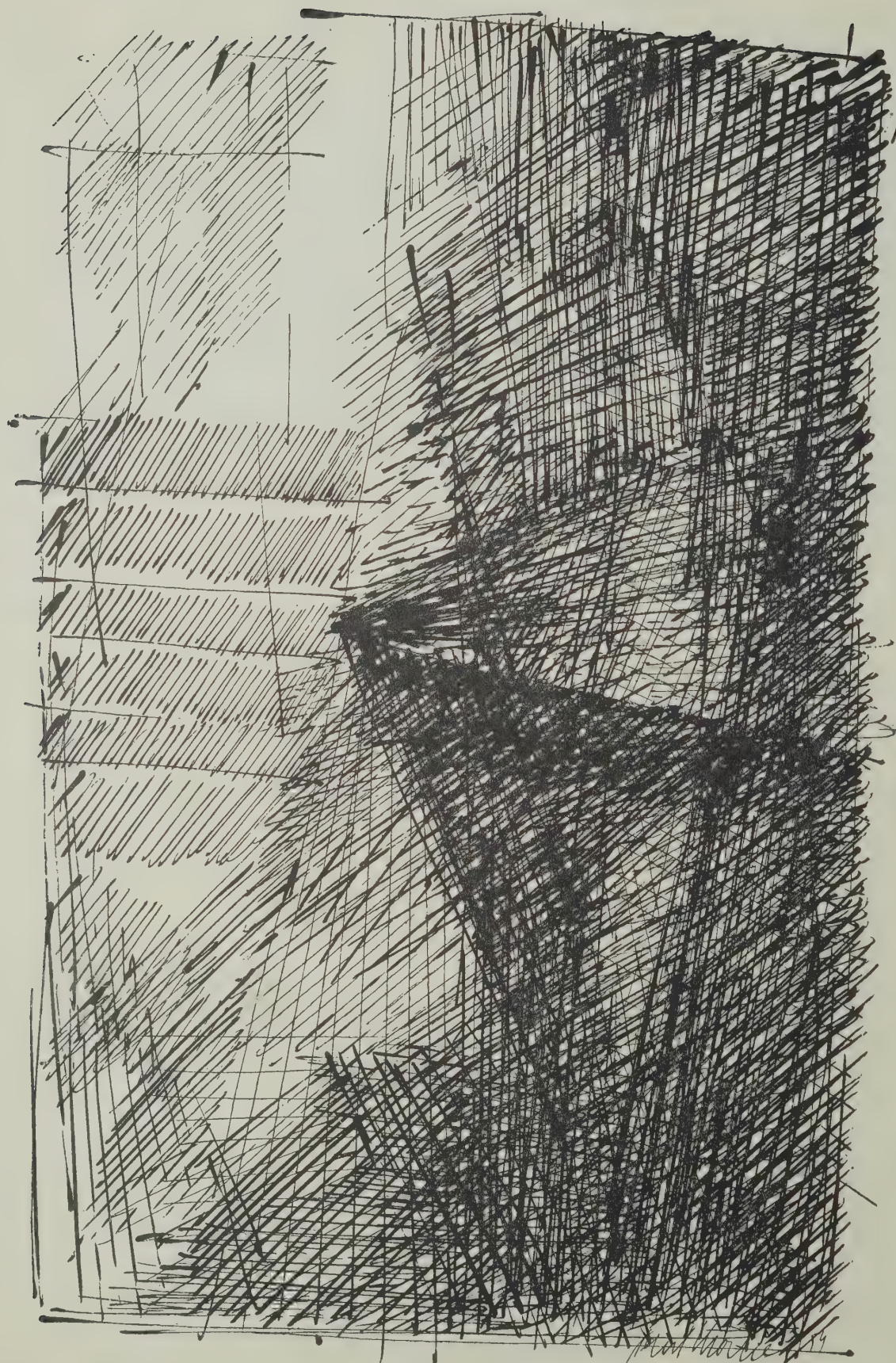
landscapes, the same objects, but the one finds in them only architectures, the other registers only colors.

This painting clearly leans its head in the direction of impressionism. A pure sentiment tries to drown itself in the original forces of nature, but a nature which is calm and hospitable, never evil. We find the same attitude in Bazaine, to whom Van Lint owes an obvious debt. This debt, ever visible, prevents the painter from finding more structured forms, even though he had done very well with them some ten years ago. But he probably thinks, like so many others, that this is an old problem which no longer has any relevance. I myself do not think so. There is a strength of architecture, just as there is a strength of nature. Why not marry them? It can produce a Le Nôtre - which is not too bad a



32,  
Gaston BERTRAND  
Composition for a wall, 1952  
100 x 150, oil on linen.  
Dotremont collection, Uccle-Brussels.





33.  
Antoine MORTIER  
Composition, 1954  
35 x 24, drawing,  
pen and China ink.  
The artist collection.





34.  
Antoine MORTIER  
Variation on an  
object No. 1, 1960,  
130 x 89,  
oil on linen.  
Private collection.



35.  
Antoine MORTIER  
In the silence, 1960  
130 x 162, oil on linen.  
Private collection.



thing. It can also produce the Villa d'Este. In these we find order and fullness.

In some recent works, which are very luminous, we feel Van Lint succumbing to the delight of losing his footing, of sinking into unknown spaces, brush in hand. Again I am reminded of Bazaine, who is somewhat obsessed by the idea of jumping into the water. It is the lure of danger. But the risk involved is a calculated one. For neither Bazaine nor Van Lint ever abandons control.

Nor does Antoine Mortier, who derives from his contemplation of nature, or of his dreams, great dramatic compositions which could serve as settings for some modern Oresteia. They show a visible kinship with the American Franz Kline, with the Frenchman Soulages, at times also with Rouault because of the vigorous black rims around the prevailingly red and blue coloring striving for a stained-glass window effect. But Mortier would be a Rouault who was in no way illustrative and strongly tempted by abstraction. These canvases treated with a few broad brush strokes, violent and brief like a logger's felling of a tree, have nothing figurative about them but the titles (*The Accordeon Player, Variation on a torso, The Flight into Egypt, The Rowers, The Foundlings*). But instead of going out of the way to find affinities in France and in America for these works, why not rather recognize that they are in the succession of Permeke? I can quite see Mortier as a Permeke having taken to the wilds. At last, the wide open spaces! But taking to the wilds does not mean that you have left miseries behind, for you carry them with you. In fact, solitude aggravates and intensifies them. And one need only meet Mortier two or three times, visit his dreary dwelling to know that his tragedy is a real one, that he is imprisoned in it, that he is alone, whereas Soulages paints cheerfully and cultivates society, which fully reciprocates.

Certain large canvases of Mortier's of the last years are hallucinatory adventures in blackness. We walk along the edge of precipices, we witness a search for the absolute that we can follow touch by touch, losing our way in a chasm of uncertainty from which he escapes unscathed thanks to a superhuman tenacity. *Scorched earth* is one of these, a large, sovereignly simply canvas, full of secret irritations which require the collusion of the viewer to be endurable. But other

canvases, like *The Summits, In the silence*, reproduced in this book, are of the same class. I beg the reader to turn to them and to read Léon-Louis Sosset's comment.

AT THE OPPOSITE POLE FROM MORTIER, Pierre Alechinsky surrounds himself with the best of his generation and prospects the world with the refined flair of a thousand-faceted intelligence. He lives in Paris, and like Soulages is a part of the "stable" of the Galerie de France. His painted work, often in bright colors, is full of youthful exuberance. His large drawings and his inks combine a playful facility with a measured extravagance. He went to Japan and brought back the seed of calligraphy, not without carefully selecting it. The tender grays of Toko Shinoda impressed him. With this he mixed reminiscences of Dubuffet (I am still speaking of his India inks) and perhaps of the monk Sengai who was recently revealed to us by the Cernuschi Museum, but whose strangely facetious work Alechinsky may have come across during his visit to Japan. The monk's strokes and touch, supremely disdainful of all rules, but refined to the extreme, are strikingly to be found in Alechinsky, particularly in the drawings that illustrate Amos Kenan's *Les Tireurs de langue*. They reveal a calculated infantilism, running over with charm.

In his painting we find the same soft lines, the same seductiveness, which give the appearance of being far removed from any rigor, from any method, but which have their own logic, their order, their methodology. There is in Alechinsky a remarkable colorist closely linked to a draftsman skilful in allusiveness, in pranks. His brush relishes ever-changing fluidities, languid stretchings. Literary content is never wholly absent. The work turns its back, deliberately, on Mondrian and the entire constructivist tendency. Alechinsky, who has a natural gift for dialectics, stated his case in 1951 in his article *Abstraction faite*: "Is it really essential to foresee what a blank canvas is to become? Would this not destroy its essential mystery? Is it not better to penetrate into a virgin cavern than to follow the chromium-plated hand-rails of the Han grottos? Is it not better to plunge into the unknown of a chasm than to go away from it after having filled it with concrete?"

This is very well said, and I know that there are many grottos still intact which are full of secrets. But



36.  
Pierre ALECHINSKY  
The Spirit of family, 1959  
114 x 162, oil on linen.  
Particular collection, Paris.

in the realm of painting I find that many intrepid investigators in both hemispheres have ventured into the same grotto, that they have set themselves up in it comfortably, that the grotto is crowded and that all those who emerge from it brandish the same fossil.

There is in fact little difference between drawings which imitate graffiti to perfection, whether they be by Pollock, by Dubuffet, by Jorn or Alechinsky. It is always the same abdication before nature "which invents better than men". I consider *Les Tireurs de langue* exemplary in this realm. And the title is a whole program.

A whole vast sector of the art of our time is putting out its tongue. At whom? It does not matter. I find the language crude; the art on a low level.

To say what I really think, I fear that true novelty is not to be found in the bottom of grottos, despite the supplementary light that we may bring from the outside, but in broad daylight where man educates nature and adds to it, in the variety of concepts and of styles, the works of his spirit.

Without venturing into new caverns, without uttering shrieks of triumph or despair, Anne Bonnet, who



died prematurely, has left us canvases which are fine examples of the close bond between architecture and sensibility. Works like *La Ville d'or* and a few others are the end result and the reward of twenty years of effort. The calm and the solidity of maturity are there, but there is no absence of poetic freshness. These are objects which do not assault you, which you can savor at leisure without being left breathless.

ANOTHER BELGIAN WOMAN — Marthe Donas — has had a strange destiny.

In a suburb of Brussels I paid a visit to a little elderly lady — reticent, ever so modest, opening up just a little to show paintings recently completed, some of

them deplorable, others charmingly clumsy, obviously abstract. The home was of the shriveled-up lower middle-class type, very cluttered, without any other character than the ugliness of the details. The hostess was obviously reluctant to tell her story. She preferred it to be known that her husband was a sworn translator, that her daughter was in a convent. The smell of the soup-pot hovered over all this.

Was I really in the presence of the person who, in the early twenties, so greatly intrigued us in our Antwerp circles? Her name was then Tour Donas (in *Der Sturm*) and Tour d'Onasky (in *De Stijl*). It was said that she was from Antwerp, that she lived in Paris, in Berlin, in Nice, I don't know where else, but no one had ever seen her. Yet she had taken part in an Antwerp



37.  
Pierre ALECHINSKY  
*The Surf*, 1959  
114 x 162, oil on linen.  
Particular collection, Paris.



38.  
Marthe DONAS  
Pencil-drawing, 1918, 28 x 20 1/2.  
Private collection.





39.  
Marthe DONAS  
Pencil-drawing, 1917, 28 x 21.  
Private collection.

exhibition, with a considerable number of submissions. But who had sent them? Was it not Walden, the curator of the Sturm Gallery? For my part, I was inclined to think that Tour d'Onasky was a name invented by van Doesburg, like I. K. Bonset and Aldo Camini.

In 1924 we received from Berlin *Einblick in Kunst*, by Walden, with a colored reproduction of a very fine abstract work by Tour Donas. But Walden made no mention of the artist in his text and we still knew nothing about her. The whole thing could still be a hoax.

It was only after a quarter of a century that this myth became transformed into a tangible person. We learned at the same time that Marthe Donas had abandoned for more than twenty years the brush to which she owed such a brilliant start. In his book *Die Frau als Künstlerin*, Hans Hildebrandt writes: "Among those who tend toward abstraction, there is also the Belgian Tour Donas, who got her training in Paris in the cubist circles and who is very friendly with Archipenko. Her work is more playful than that of the cubists, but she exerts a strong attraction by her gentleness, her refinement. She modifies cubist strength by her feminine charm."

Today Marthe Donas has taken a place in history, a place she wholly deserves for her painted works or drawings done between 1916 and 1925 — works which, while they belong belatedly to the cubist climate, draw from this climate unchallengeably personal accents suffused by a radiant and pliant sensibility.

WHAT CAN I SAY ABOUT ANTWERP that is not nostalgic? So many bonds that tied me to my native city have been broken by rejections or by death, which is a brutal rejection whose finality one cannot forgive. I could say as much about Paris where I was born only in 1923. But Paris is a monster with which one never ceases to battle. Antwerp is calcinated.

This does not prevent good souls from living there, from haunting the museums, the admirable attics. But everything in Antwerp is a museum. You dine in a sixteenth century house, you have tea in a Burgundy Chapel, an inner court of the purest Tuscan style is the

entrance to a photo-engraving studio, an eighteenth century private mansion is a bank. Without mentioning Christophe Plantin's house, which has never ceased to be a printing shop, and the immense attic of the Hesse House, whose beams are as many functional Brancusi's, which has been transformed into an *avant-garde* exhibition room.

For the *avant-garde*, it must be said, also exists, and not only as a memory of the twenties. Among so many admirable calcinations there are a few young madmen who have rolled up their sleeves to help the world bring today to birth (1). Jozef Peeters, who had taken up his brushes again and rediscovered the enthusiasm of his youth, encouraged them, supported them, until death carried him away in 1960.

The first one I met was Bert De Leeuw, who has for years practiced the advanced school of the void. He does not lose himself in it and dominates this vast subject with the mastery of a demiurge who is all-powerful and very humble at the same time. An accomplished orchestra conductor who has at his disposal a complete instrumental ensemble but uses only two muted violins, while the whole ensemble is nevertheless there, contributing to this *mezza voce* by the weight of silence. This extraordinary reserve, of which the tension can be sensed, produces all-white paintings which extend like landscapes seen from the ionosphere and others which are all-black until the return of a memory of light.

How does De Leeuw bear the weight of this enormous and little-understood work? He does not bear it, it is the work that bears him. His painting is the release from his other vocation, for the painter's livelihood is a small publicity poster business. A release and a recompense. Now I am free, says the painter when he sets to work, free to paint unsaleable pictures, free to paint the kind of paintings farthest removed from publicity. Thus there is nothing in this painting to strike the eye, but an infinite discretion, the most delicate shades. And we become aware of the occult presence of the great thundering orchestra which will remain silent but attentive, knowing itself to be fit for other tasks.

(1) I should like to pay tribute, in passing, to the initiative of burgomaster Craeybeckx who in 1950 created the Biennial of world sculpture in Middelheim Park, which has gradually been transformed into an admirable open-air sculpture museum.





40.

Louis VAN LINT  
Earth and water, 1962  
183 x 207, oil on linen.  
The artist collection.



41.  
Bert DE LEEUW  
Secret light, 1955  
85 x 145, oil on linen.  
Private collection.

Curiously enough, these subtleties are completely belied by the black and white gouaches done with an air-brush in which De Leeuw works for the most strident contrasts of light and shade. The second vocation shows its cloven hoof in spite of everything.

VERY DIFFERENT IS THE CASE of his neighbor Mara. This painter had a long-time predilection for a multiplicity of colors. He succeeded fairly well, at times, in making them all cohabit and in communicating to the canvas, despite the too great richness of the means employed, a look of unity which satisfies the eye. Mara's recent works resolutely turn their backs on these

brocades and are marked by austerity. These gray deserts after so much animation, this calm after so much fire come as a surprise. I have a weakness for this painter. I can't help it. I liked him in his state of opulence, I like him in his voluntary poverty. Why? I can explain it no more than Mara can explain his own paintings. For the man is rather on the grumpy side, somewhat unsociable, almost inhospitable. He remains silent before his canvases, communicates not at all. He is incapable even of smiling, of catching a flash of humor. He was a block in the presence of people. But before the easel he is his own master. Here is the rare painter, I mean the one whose brush is his sole means of expression.





42.  
Pol MARA  
Composition, 1961  
48 x 33  
water-color.  
Private collection.





43.  
POL MARA  
Homage to Ensor, 1959  
160 x 130, oil on linen  
Private collection.



What point would Van Anderlecht have reached today, had he lived? He died in 1961, leaving a series of big paintings executed with broad, lightning-quick sponge strokes, applied with the full swing of the arm. It is related to the American *action painting*, but the rhythmic of the canvas has affinities with that of the German Karl Otto Götz as well. Van Anderlecht, however, has greater density, and apparently expends greater strength. Some think very highly of him. Far be it from me to disapprove them: the spectacle of violence has tonic virtues when one is not oneself exposed to danger. There are very respectable people who would not think of missing a catch-as-catch-can match.

This direct, purely affective painting has been practiced for years by Anna Staritsky, but in a much softened form. Violence has become human, the painter's feelings, while they still express force, have become approachable. The spectator does not only receive shocks: he is accepted as an interlocutor. This is parti-

cularly apparent in the innumerable ink improvisations by this painter and in her *picture-objects* composed with the text of a poet. The texts are sometimes chock-full of spelling mistakes, probably in order to demonstrate that here it is the picture that is important and not the poem.

Staritsky is Russian in origin and Belgian through her marriage with the Antwerp painter Orix. Both live in Paris, but not in the same realm of painting. Orix for long years tried to find himself by following the most arduous paths. I could not quite warm up to his work. Just recently, however, he seems to have found his way, in collages of fabrics covered with white or finely shaded paint. Certain canvases are punctured by *craters*, a process already used by Mirò in another context.

I must likewise call attention to the paintings by Simone Lacour on loose-woven, often transparent bur-lap. I seem to have come upon the Belgian woman *par excellence*, since Simone Lacour was born in Antwerp



44.  
Englebert VAN ANDERLECHT  
Bottom wave, 1958  
140 x 202, oil on linen.  
Mrs. Van Anderlecht collection, Brussels.





45.  
Joseph LACASSE  
Magic Robert 1, 1931  
116 x 90, oil on linen.  
Private collection.



of Flemish parents and she says her heart belongs to Liège. As she lives in Paris, the peak of the triangle, she measures all Belgium with a pair of compasses.

In her painting she makes her appeal with great skill by using the most limited means. We recognize in it the spirit of Léon Zack, Feito's simple contrasts, the refinements of the Orientals. As we see, Simone Lacour is altogether in the most up-to-date current of painting. But she has strength and restraint. The combination of these two virtues will certainly enable her, with perseverance, to distinguish herself in the years to come.

PARIS CAN BOAST GREAT GLORIES which are sometimes the product of miseries to which none other can compare and of proud solitudes.

At the end of the Impasse Ronsin, set quite far back from the street, the cluster of black-stained hovels, built directly on the beaten earth, made famous by the presence of Brancusi, still stands. His studio, as we know, has been carefully reconstructed at the Musée de l'Art Moderne in Paris. More exactly its inner atmosphere, for the real studio has not budged from the Impasse Ronsin where it has kept its sordid shantytown appearance that frightened so many visitors for forty years.

Lacasse, too, has been there for forty years, I imagine, in a studio facing the one formerly occupied by the Rumanian. There he has endured cold and hunger, there he roars and he sings, he receives an occasional friend, and above all he paints mercilessly against a background of irremediable disorder, on a carpet of thick dust, which is surely venerable.

His work is enormous, significant in many respects. You will read its history and an analysis of it by Maurits Bilcke further on in this book. This work expresses all the soul-states of a tortured, mystical man. The range extends from great geometrical compositions having a majestic calm to an all-red violence accompanied by a brief green or blue fury.

He is one of those men to whom men bring only disappointments. Even when they seek out society, no communication is established. Or else it is the wrong kind of communication, and it hurts. So it is better to retreat to the studio shut off from the world, without any window on life, the sole light coming from above.

WE COME BACK TO ANTWERP, for I have to say a word about those unfathomable painters who have placed themselves at the limit of the capacities of vision. They exhibit a supreme astuteness and a supreme indigence. Jef Verheyen's monochrome canvases are marked by vague and very dim memories of light. There is an infinite difference between saying nothing in order to say nothing and saying nothing because one has nothing to say. Who — or what — will give me the key to make the distinction unerringly? When I called Verheyen's attention to the fact that one of his monochrome canvases, too tightly stretched, showed a slight warping at the points where the nails were and that this warping, repeated a hundred times, made a shadow that made it look as though there was a kind of border all round the canvas, he replied, "Well — does that bother you? Not me. I find that it adds something." That is just what I thought: adding something to nothing. But I was not expecting that the painter would congratulate himself on this accident. Adding something. To be sure. My eye alights on a booklet by Verheyen. In order to support the emptiness of his monochromes the artist here summons up very great reinforcements: Cézanne, Newton, Joubert, Henry Miller, Heraclitus, Plato, Poincaré, Aristotle, Empedocles, Parmenides of Elea, Lao-Tseu... That is adding too much, much too much. I surrender.

In an art gallery in town I saw a monochrome canvas which I thought was by Verheyen. It was signed Vercammen. "What", I said, "but that is the way Verheyen paints!" "Not at all", the director of the gallery retorted, "it is Verheyen who paints the way Vercammen does!" It is a quarrel as to who came first. Others have told me that while Vercammen had preceded Verheyen, Verheyen has gone farther than Vercammen. Science advances with such great strides that the common mortal can follow only at a distance. Today several kinds of nothingness are known and only the art critics of the New Wave, those whose eyes have received appropriate training, can recognize the difference. I shall therefore have to go to school, like Michelangelo when he was seventy-two, "to try to learn something".

ANOTHER MONOCHROMIST, Paul Van Hoeydonck for a long time practiced the white on white picture in



46.  
Pol BURY  
Ponctuation, 1960, 122 x 92, mobile  
Private collection.



which, in a certain light, mat and shiny forms, or slightly tinted forms, appeared. A tussle with Tinguely, the inventor of painting machines, has left on his soul the impress of a failure which he must at all cost compensate. Did he think that through this tussle he had acquired the recipe of ways to succeed, the manner of forcing the hand of destiny? But he was not Tinguely and his Flemish gift of gab was of no help. He then proceeded to do everything and in his work could be found in profusion Mathias Goeritz's nails, then Descombin's colored glasses, then the blues and golds of some vanished mystifier, then a neo-dadaism, with and without mustaches. All of this skilfully manipulated. There is no denying that this painter reveals a feeling for experimentation combined with a feeling for the cabaret show which is amusing. But the demonstration that one can do everything does not in itself constitute a work. Art is not synonymous with artifice.

There is, alas, no remedy for this. Artists are too much praised for their mediocre works, so they do not develop in depth. Collectors are less and less trained to be critical, critics are less and less free, young painters more and more led astray by the resulting facility. Is it not enough to make a little noise, to stir a lot of wind, in order to succeed? Before long the young artist begins to think in terms of producing an effect, resorts to the crudest publicity. Wind sells. He who sells has wind in his sails. And talent expends itself in intrigue.

Some would like to be condottieri who will never be anything but traveling salesmen, others dream of being brilliant wits who can only handle bluff. There are some whom pride, and the susceptibility that accompanies it, makes unseasonably aggressive, even inhuman. They can be approached only with circumspection and heavy flattery. In such cases the artist's condition resembles an illness, and I am very much afraid it is incurable.

Many of these impatient horsemen are obsessed by the dada "farce" — which was not a farce at all — and choose the least promising grain from this rich soil. They are not in Belgium and are outside my subject.

There is Bury, however. But this calm man pursues a calm adventure, and does so with a certain order. Movement fascinates him. What I like about these objects that move so pleasantly is precisely their measuredness,

their limits. I confess that they appeal to me especially when they stop. But if they move, is it not in order to have me stop? Is it not to hold me longer? And what do they have to tell me if not that they can stop at several stages of their evolution, all equally acceptable?

For movement, here, remains in a sense static and cannot be compared to the movement of music or the dance. In these last the theme develops through variations and oppositions, by attention being captivated by this development itself.

A middle course was found by Calder who simply lets elements whose number and weight form a composition evolve at the mercy of the air currents. Nature — a nature presumed to be well-behaved — is asked to collaborate.

Bury's tricks are discreet. He has no desire to bewilder and soberly spells out what he has to say. It is this reserve that fascinates, much more than the novelty of the find itself. An exhibition in Paris by the artist, all red and black, seemed to me to offer the best that has been done in this vein for some years.

As can be seen, Bury's objects have fully succeeded in attracting my attention. That is a success. And I leave them, which is rare, without any irritation.

NO, RENE GUIETTE neither bluffs nor gloats, he is the soul of elegance and cultivates a graceful detachment in the house built by Le Corbusier in which he has been living since 1926. Permeable to all influences, this painter has pursued a winding path, has tried, unsuccessfully, to find himself for forty years, until his roving head, like so many others, was to reach the universal target: Zen buddhism. His calligraphy is executed with a soft and loving touch, the coloring is tender, at times melting. Are we at the century's end? It could be. I suppose that it would not be very difficult for a great Zen scholar to prove that, according to some very old Chinese calendar, we are at this very moment at the end of a century. A different century, obviously. In which case, René Guiette's painting represents exactly the last page.

On a sombre keyboard, Verstockt has painted beautiful paintings which have vigor and subdued brightnesses, at times so discreet that the eye must become accustomed to them. These are canvases that one can



47.  
Marc VERSTOCKT  
Composition III, 1959-1960  
32 x 40, oil on linen.  
Private collection.

look at for a long time. They fortify the eye without wounding it, without irritating it. The blacks are eminently rich. There is no color which has so many secrets, so many values as black, and Verstockt knows it.

Guy Vandenbranden, who is a great master of geometry, uses blacks in flat tones which he combines with white, building the painting with just these two elements. It composes a pure architecture, elementary, but conceived with a rare density. He has more recently abandoned this extreme rigor for a more mixed style. It is too bad. I think that from his very limited subject Vandenbranden could, like Mondrian, have extracted a considerable body of work.

#### WILL YOU COME WITH ME TO AMSTERDAM ?

There we shall pay a visit, on the Stadhouderskade, to Joseph Ongenae of Antwerp, who has been settled there for several years and who works in the strictest Mondrian tradition. The great difficulty in such a case is to follow Mondrian without imitating him. Many of Ongenae's canvases are but paraphrases, very skilful ones, of the works of the pioneer of pure form. At times he succeeds in liberating himself from the tongs without being unfaithful to the spirit. Those works are like a dare or a gamble, such are the hidden forces which the horizontal-vertical theme possesses when it is used with mastery and entire independence towards Mondrian.





48.  
Joseph ONGENAE  
Lozenge, 1957  
88 1/2 x 88 1/2, oil on wood  
Private collection.

We are in a district in Amsterdam where Mondrian lived for a long time. Between 1897 and 1911 he had four or five domiciles here not far from Onge-nae's present studio. At that time, as we know, he was very far from pure form. When he launched upon it in 1917, he had little success with his brand-new art despite the founding of *De Stijl*. He left Holland two years later, never to return. Time has changed color. Mondrian is now a sign. A very bright one even. And this man of Antwerp who treads the paths made smooth by him finds many echoes. He has fourteen paintings in the Stedelijk Museum, some thirty in the reserves of the commune. At the very time that I was paying him a visit a collector from Groningen had just bought two paintings. Satellites definitely steer a truer course than comets. And, after all, they also give light.

GHEENT, WITH ITS CANALS, ITS BELLS, its bell-towers and its Château des Comtes... By one of these canals lives the painter and poet Hugo Claus. As solidly esconced in his way of life as the Château des Comtes on its ramparts. Making a show of cynicism. Obviously intelligent. Some people are lucky to be what they are. They go, they take, their arrogance is their only law.

In a enormous studio, a kind of reception hall of a defunct late-eighteenth-century palace, the painter generously shows me some large abstract canvases, high in color, some of them with golds. The forms are bristling, angular. There is a visible effort to achieve a certain baroquism. Before a painting crowded with dots I mention the name of Picabia. Claus gives a start: "Picabia is my thinking master," he proclaims, and he lets me know that he "rather likes a canvas to be just on this side of bad taste."

The conversation, too is just on this side of the unbearable. Unrelieved aggressiveness and a rehash of old dada slogans, such as "I nurture my vices", "I dote on people who love money", "Insolent people are the only ones worth talking to."

— Look, he tells me, I spent three years in Rome, and I waited till the very last days to visit the Vatican church.

— I can understand that, I said, but what about the Sistine Chapel ?

— I only saw that, too, in the last few days.

— And during those three years you were never curious to see it ?

— One is curious about other things."

To be sûre, to be sure. Goodbye, my dear sir. It was a great pleasure...

How melancholy the canals are ! There are people who swallow the world whole, others who nibble at it. I admire the former, I take more stock in the latter. The former are at times obliged to vomit it up. As for the nibblers, they progress slowly, to be sure, but they don't draw back. They look for more secret flavors. I like to think that they never lose their appetites.

Raveel is a friend of Claus's. Put on his track by several people, my eye having been caught by certain canvases, I set out in search of him in the village of Machelen and did not find him. His father, in the backshop of a small liquor store, spotlessly clean, showed me three or four other paintings which confirmed me in the idea that the painting of New York, of Saint-Germain-des-Prés and of the via Brera has reached out its tentacles even to the villages of Flanders. There is no longer any isolated spot, there is no longer any artist out of touch with the world. In 1962 abstract art has penetrated everywhere. We all belong to the same village.

As for Raveel's painting, it expresses rather well a certain joy of painting on the part of a being having rediscovered the sensuality of the primate in its pure state. Rediscovering this state requires a great deal of art, I say so without the slightest intention of being humorous, and it requires a whole series of victories over commonplaces. To become a child again, to become natural again... But these, too, after all, are commonplaces, for they have been current coin since expressionism, since *Die Brücke*. I cannot help thinking of Georges Lebrun, a painter of Ghent who is today forgotten, whom I knew in 1929. He already had that intelligent anarchy of which I find a renewal in Raveel, that irony of the relaxed touch, that clumsiness which is an offensive, not an abandonment. But Lebrun did not take hold; he was thirty years ahead of his time.

All the same, Raveel's canvases each have their autonomy, and in this autonomy an intense, at times unwonted life, which startles the eye, offends it, holds it and never leaves one indifferent.



IN GHENT ITSELF, I paid a visit to Octave Landuyt, by whom I saw a brachycephalic sculpture and paintings ambiguously halfway between abstraction and surrealism. I marveled to find the little middle-class house, so outwardly colorless, such a museum of natural history. Crammed full of strange objects. Had I not been in Frits Van den Berghe's house, thirty-three years before? Does nature often go in for such re-editions?

A whole day, in fact a week, would have been needed to take in all those bizarre forms, but only a specialist's eye could have inspected them without quickly being overcome by an irritating fatigue. Landuyt here studies the most classical and the oddest animal and plant morphology. He is seeking, it seems to me, a certainty of the uncertain and one would not be surprised to come upon the most uncertain and viscous form of all, the jelly-fish. But this creature keeps better in the imagination than in nature.

The fact remains that Landuyt, with his collections, brings together the elements of a very authentic baroque art. It is a painting full of adenomas, of protoplasms, of visceral circumvolutions, very much along the line of those little monsters in jars that the surrealists in every country have so often gone in for. What we have here is quite obviously a kind of naturalism, but one essentially attached to membranous developments, to sea-weed vegetations, to gelatinous transparencies. This kind of thing falls, for the most part, beyond the scope of the present book.

JAN BURSENS lives in a bright villa full of youngsters in a suburb of Ghent. The library is well stocked, the conversation free, uncommitted, open. It is an environment in which the spirit feels at home.



49.  
Octave LANDUYT  
Organic forms, 1962  
100 x 165, oil on linen.  
Private collection.



50.  
Jan BURSENS  
Explosive geology, 1961  
165 x 185, oil on linen.  
Private collection.

In the studio, which adjoins the garden littered with toys, we penetrate the arcana of painting considered as a delight of colors. It is a flavor factory and they are all there, from the wildest to the most refined, on the same canvas. These canvases are worlds of pleasure shattered by passion, put together again by a master's touch.

Vast horizontal paintings, which are like testing stands of invented landscapes, recall Dubuffet's *Soils* and *Materiologies*, but without the irritating infantilism of

the ex-wine merchant. The color is much richer too. A certain aristocracy presides over its choice. The colors give the impression of being perfumed, with a perfume that intoxicates. Burssens' last paintings, in which dull golds are very skilfully drowned in the multitude of the other colors, strike me as sumptuous successes (*The Clown*, *The Inca*).

We are, to be sure, in the very middle of the thick Flanders carpet. And Burssens' painting is completely impregnated with this opulence. Considered in them-



selves, its multiple resonances place it *ipso facto* on a universal level. I should like to see this work better known by the great authorities on international art.

I can say the same for the work of Bertrand, of De Leeuw, of Mortier, of Van Lint, of Mara. And I don't forget their elders : Servranckx, Peeters, too long neglected, Lacasse, the abstract work of Joostens, the cubist work of Marthe Donas.

BRUGES THE DEAD IS FULL OF FLAGS, of fanfares, of parades, of people. I have never known it otherwise. But the mortuary glamor with which Rodenbach has invested it has contributed not a little to attracting tourists. The proximity to the coast, which is very lively in summer, does the rest. Bruges is today one of the liveliest towns in Belgium. The review *West-Vlaanderen* publishes very well-informed issues on modern art in all fields and the Raaklijn society is an international circle such as I should be happy to see in Paris (1).

To the south of the town, on the road to Torhout, we come upon a small peasant house which is like thousands of others on the edge of all the roads of Flanders. They look very much like the Breton houses, for that matter : no upper story, white-washed brick walls, tile roofs, green shutters. A tough plot of grass and a hawthorne hedge surround this divine simplicity. And the climate within matches it perfectly. Nevertheless the great peasant stove, which generally steps forward into the middle of the main room, is here replaced by a more discreet heating device; there are comfortable armchairs and on the walls two paintings which make no effort to call attention to themselves, so attuned are they to their surroundings. They are by Daan Van Severen, and it is in his house that we happen to be. His wife is a meadow daisy, the blondest of them all, and their children are crickets.

But these paintings which try to pass unseen are altogether remarkable. A spirit invests their geometry which is a kind of religious humility. Let us go up into the studio, or rather let us take the ladder that leads up to it and pass through the trap-door. The attic, to which it leads, reminds me once again how big the attics of small houses can be.

Here, in the silence, under the rafters which have the color of rough homespun, a kind of monk of painting patiently labors. Does he labor or does he pray ? On one of the walls, a small piece of paper bears these words :

*Here is nakedness  
the rest is raiment.  
Here is raiment  
the rest is finery.  
Here is purity  
the rest is defilement.  
Here is poverty  
the rest is ornament.*

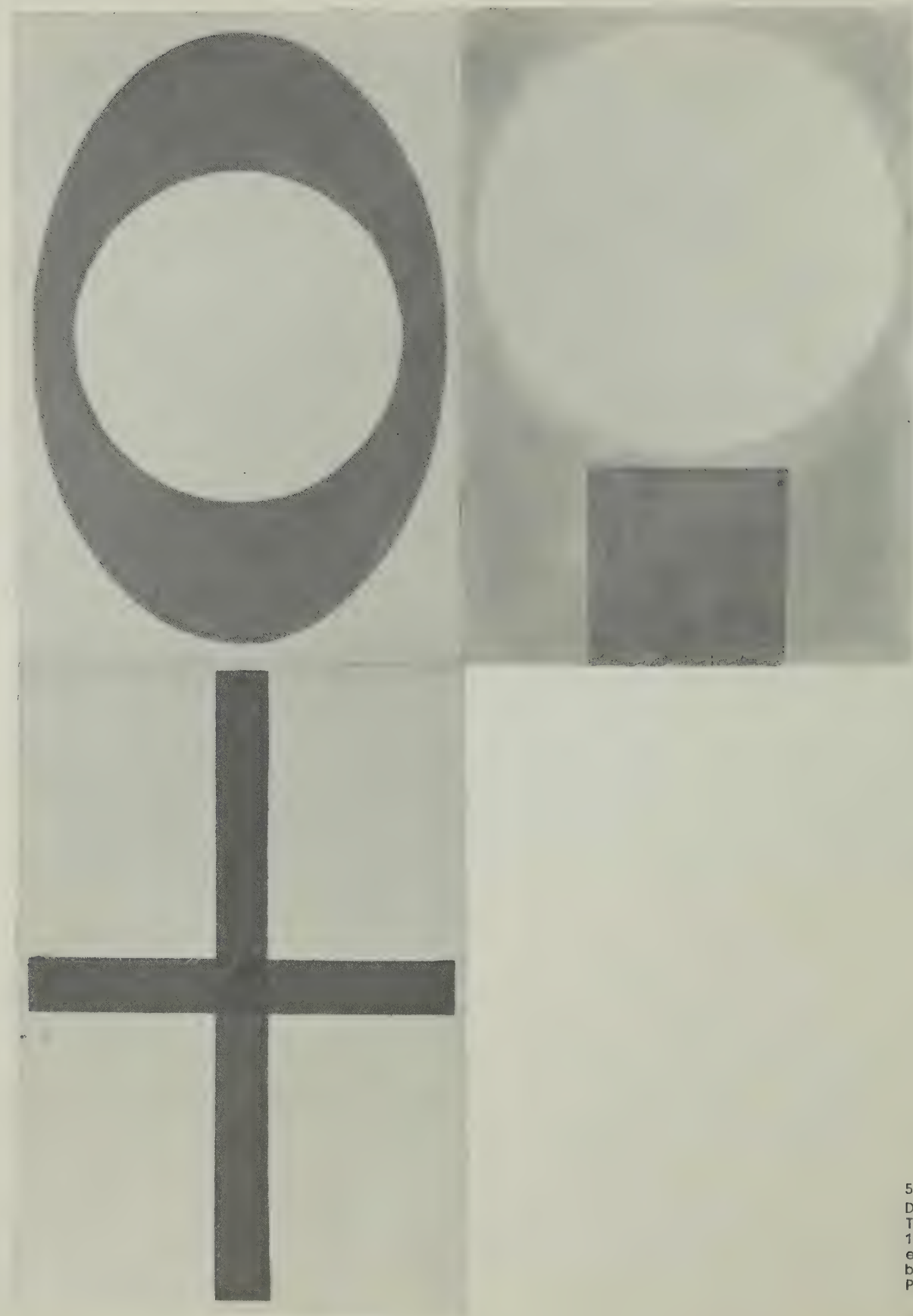
A text by Péguy when you would expect Gezelle ! But let us not be more nationalistic than the Fleming : this motto perfectly suits the mood of the place and the person of Van Severen. His paintings are *yantras*, slowly matured meditations, spiritual exercises carried to the point of saturation where expression is resolved in silence. The picture is a very simple geometry, without color, almost always symmetrical. It hypnotizes if it does not leave you indifferent. For me these rare works, rare like those of Brancusi, are carved in granite. They must be removed from any surroundings, the place must be built around each one of them.

What a strange feeling to find myself here ! I am not used to this climate. I am no longer used to it. Paris, the commercialization of art, the bought reputations, the publicity racket, the nauseating snobbery to which I myself am after all an accessory... something in me has been wounded. I suffer from it constantly, so accustomed to the pain that I am no longer aware of it. But here I am aware of it. I mentioned Brancusi. I could also mention Mondrian. Since 1925, when I used to visit him in his studio on the rue du Départ, in Montparnasse, I have never again known that effacement of the person combined with a work which is an epitome of spirit and of culture. An epitome and a summit. A work which at the same time remains hidden. Yet it is in such places that the conscience of the world lives.

Van Severen can remain silent, I need no comment, for everything is familiar to me here. I breathe as I have not done for a long time, as I probably shall not for a long time to come.

And I rediscover my conception of value : nascent art, the complete stripping of the spirit, a calm search

1 Since a short time Bruges has also a literary review of a much advanced spirit « Diagram »



51.  
Daan VAN SEVEREN  
Three drawings  
1962  
each : 54 x 37  
body-colours.  
Private collection.



which suffices unto itself, something which can neither be weighed nor measured and which remains untouched by trade and show.

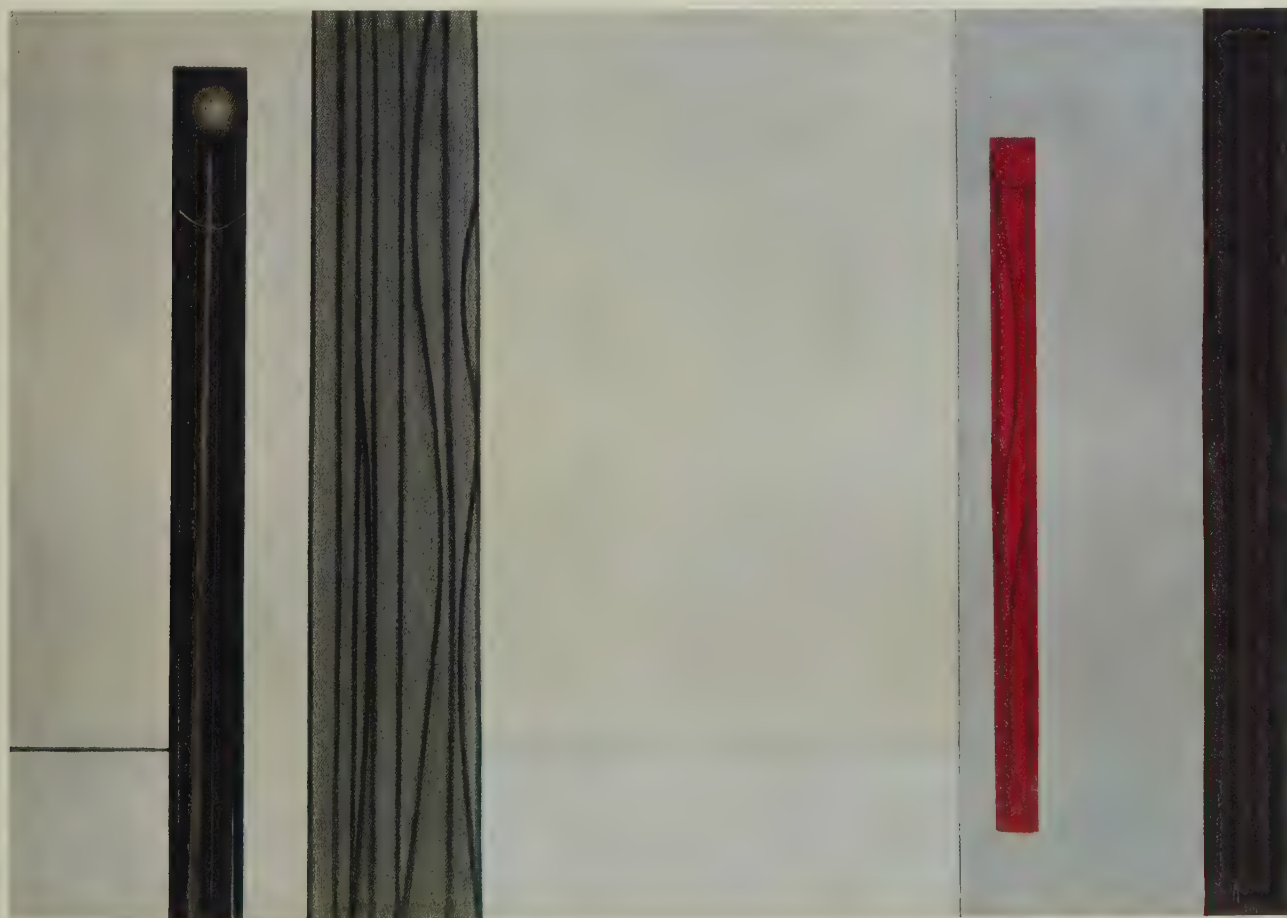
What will come of this? Van Severen is thirty-five. It may be that nothing will remain of his art in a few years, in a few days. No matter — I cherish the mirage, I shall continue to cherish it. I leave a stake to mark the passage.

Swinberghe lives in the town itself. With him we are back in the world, but in a constructed world, both very solid and full of feeling. Certain paintings are composed of solid blocks which look like very fine curtains, others are all horizontal scales. Transparent blue is this painter's favorite color.

LUC PEIRE, WHO IS OLDER than his friends Swinberghe and Van Severen by more than ten years, also

has a fuller past, a more abundant work. His motto, like that of the other two, is *nothing too much*. In his case very explicitly, since the famous Greek formula is the very title of one of Peire's paintings. But the painter has had to travel a long road in order to achieve this economy and it is in this very road that the major interest of his work lies. For this road remains present in the barest canvases, constitutes their spirit, their density.

Up to seven or eight years ago Peire was a figure painter. The figures have gradually become dematerialized to the point of resolving themselves into simple vertical or gently inclined lines. Even now, I believe, nature remains the painter's point of departure, but a nature sovereignly transposed. The abstraction is complete. It leaves the artist with a very restricted register of planes and lines which he uses to wonderful account,



52.  
Luc PEIRE  
Rotterdam, 1956  
73 x 100, oil on linen.  
Private collection.



53.  
Kurt LEWY  
Enamel, 1956, 12 x 10.  
M.S. collection, Paris.



sparing color, never seeking effects. This does not prevent *Marcinelle* from being impressive, nor *Lutèce* nor *Séville*, nor others all in gray monochrome like *Tessa* from exuding an invisible charm by their very lightness or an indefinable subtlety of their language.

Certain artists come to abstraction through a return to primitive instincts. Having more freedom, they fill it with greater license. The result is an art of pure fortuitousness which returns to nature and even to naturalism by resorting to splashes and accidents which are hardly called for.

In the case of Luc Peire we observe the contrary. As he frees himself from the object his work grows in fineness, as he abandons all attachment to nature he discovers pure rhythms, autonomous rules, selective themes and he composes or rather orchestrates with these elements paintings which are worlds distant from the world, as useless, as indispensable as a symphony by Mozart.

Works like those of Luc Peire bring an enrichment to constructed art and demonstrate that, in this field, all has not been said. He too needs to have his place in the international galaxy. But it is my guess that he already has it.

AND NOW THAT WE HAVE COME TO THE END of our journey, can we say that we have gathered a good harvest? I undertook to write this book because a first examination had taught me that there were in Belgium a dozen so-called "abstract" painters who were equal to the best in other countries. We have met more than a dozen in the course of our little journey. I assume you are satisfied, otherwise you would not have read as far as this. I also know now that genuine values remain hidden in out-of-the-way parts of the country.

While there are two or three painters with whom I have not been gentle, they will find excellent defenders further on in this book. I shall read them myself, presently, with a lively interest. I beg those whom I was unable to join, for a variety of circumstantial reasons, please to forgive me. They too are not forgotten, thanks to my collaborators.

I SHALL NOT LEAVE THE SOIL OF FLANDERS without remembering Gezelle, Streuvels, Verschaeve, nor without paying tribute to Paul Van Ostaïen, who first intro-

duced Marinetti's *Mots en liberté* and backed modern art. I was his junior by five years and he has not forgiven me for opening the doors and the windows even wider to let in all the winds. I was hardly aware of this quarrel, as I was far away.

Today Flanders is a country permeable to all the influences. Which detracts nothing from its autonomy and prepares for it an estimable place in the concert of European cultures.

Cultural roots exist, languages have their flavors and their special virtues, but frontiers will have less and less meaning. Let us keep the diversity and abolish everything that shuts off or separates. For if we should hate nationalisms, regionalisms, provincial conformities, it is well to venerate beauty wherever it is to be found and to respect its roots in the soil in which they often join those which penetrate universal understanding.

If the European cultures remain multiple through their languages they tend to become unified through the language of form. This situation appears to me irreversible. There will never again be a Laethem-Saint-Martin group, there will never again be a specifically German expressionism, there has never been a Paris school. Those who pretend that there is are squinting right up against the tips of their noses. Even if those noses have a great deal of flair, this does not take them very far in these times when the wind is blowing from the four cardinal points.

We must live on the scale of the world, we must live by an increasing number of exchanges or perish of asphyxiation with all our inherited goods.

Today, as in the time of my youth, I feel a communion with Flanders, but at the same time I see Flanders, by its innate ways of thought and the various aspects of abstract art, in communion with the world. Let us therefore salute the Flemish presence in a world in which one hundred and twenty peoples are one hundred and twenty perfectly identifiable persons, all members of the same family.

ART IS OUR SOLE POSSESSION. We progress in history with an accumulation of baggage of which art is the essential substance. Respect for religions, love of rarity, the attraction of other cultures are all forces that help us to abandon none of this baggage, but it is the aesthetic sense that makes them light for us. For this

sense is a commitment of the sensibility, it stimulates an affective fervor which communicates warmth. A kind of inner jubilation responds to the meeting of the beautiful and the true.

Philosophy munches and remunches an irreducible datum. What is being? What has value? Religion worships the question in order to fear it less, with treasures of intelligence it succeeds in enjoying the unknowable because it is unknowable, in adorning the cold law with grace. Science and technics greatly lighten man's burden, are to him a source of pride. It is they that are transforming humanity into a great family. But human intimacy is an area from which they are excluded and their greatest successes will never reduce the hunger for that other reality. This is a hunger for culture, an aesthetic hunger. We happen to be body and spirit. Materialistic, monolithic and elementary theories can do nothing to change the fact of this hunger each of us feels. There is a *being* within us that needs nourishment even as the body does. Hence it exists.

But what shall this nourishment be in an age in which man is entering interplanetary space, in which all distances have apparently been abolished? It will remain on man's scale. For if technics changes the whole landscape the classic patterns of thought are not on this account abolished. They are in fact the very guides of the technical revolution. We move forward, every day we penetrate unknowns, but our whole intellectual past accompanies us, sustains us. For the new context also comes from man and exists only for man. That is why the old roots of the cultures must not be neglected. A moment always comes when there is in them something topical. And this justifies tradition.

Earth will always be the basis, even if this earth has become other. Man will always have two feet, even if he flies more than he walks. Thus after some fits of giddiness and probably also of panic, we shall return to the simplest rules. For rule by no means sterilizes our originality. Rather, it encourages it, nourishes it. The rule, too, is a human invention. It must serve to canalize forces, to multiply them, not to oppress them. What can be done with a discipline if not violate it and flout it? That is all one can do. I too claim this liberty, this boundless irreverence in all intellectual jousts. But when it is no longer a question of brilliant improvisations but of performing solid work, each one of us is

glad to find the rule which is at his service and at the basis of the rules the principles of order and measure, that golden power which is the soul of everything that endures.

TO LIVE IS TO TRANSFORM energy through oneself. In other words, to change. But to change is essentially to go from the same to the same. To find is to find again, to do is to redo. We transform ourselves by feeding on the dead.

Music has for a long time been in possession of the abstract elements of art which the art of painting had slowly to conquer in this century. Architecture since the time of Pericles possessed the key to measurements and relationships loved for their own sakes. All religions state the same question, only the climate varies. As for philosophic thinking, it repeats itself from century to century, changing only its idiom, accentuating a given word, illuminating a given aspect of the problem.

To live is to change. But the ultimate desire for change for every living man is to become what does not change. To find, by the very virtue of change, that little residue which is the rest and which remains. There is no other search, there is no other discovery. To discover that in which the spirit finds rest. Not only a certainty: a being. An identification of oneself with an essential architecture. The simple joy of being. Of being an architecture sheltering some aesthetic joys, which are happy to have found a frame.

But this architecture is an archivolt, that is, a bridge. A link between this and that, between yesterday and tomorrow. For we are not alone, we do not want to be alone. Cut off from our bases we waste away. A bridge without supports. It is the others who enable us to live and we wish them to live by us.

In the whole world, artists, writers, art lovers, initiators support one another like so many bridges, like a vast team, all of whose elements adjust to one another, in which the clashes are signs of vitality, the quarrels structures. Whether we are powerful or puny individualities, we are all meshes in this society which, like a protoplasm, comes apart and forms again.

To be, but not without communion.

To be with.

And this is the whole *raison d'être*.

Paris, July-August, 1962.



CHRONOLOGICAL TABLES  
OF WORLD ABSTRACT ART

FROM 1910 TO 1962

CONCORDANCES

Partly issued from the  
*Dictionnaire de la peinture abstraite*  
by Michel Seuphor. (Ed. Hazan, Paris 1957.)

	FRANCE	RUSSIA	GERMANY	SWITZERLAND
1910	Analytical Cubism.		Kandinsky's first abstract water-colour. Walden launches <i>Der Sturm</i> .	Arp in Weggis.
1911	Delaunay's first <i>Windows</i> .	Larionov's and Gontcharova's Rayonnisme.	Franz Marc and Kandinsky become friends. <i>Der Blaue Reiter</i> .	
1912	Mondrian in Paris. Delaunay : <i>Simultaneous Rhythms</i> . Works by Kupka at the Salon des Indépendants.		Kandinsky : <i>Über das Geistige in der Kunst</i> . Arp visits Kandinsky.	
1913	Picabia : <i>Udnie and Edtaonisl</i> . The American Synchronists. Léger : <i>Contrasting Forms</i> .	Tatlin's first <i>Constructions</i> . Marinetti's lecture tour.	Kandinsky : <i>Rückblicke</i> . First <i>Herbstsalon</i> of the group <i>Der Sturm</i> .	
1914	Synthetic Cubism. Larionov and Gontcharova Exhibition.	Malevitch's Cubo-futurism.	Death of Macke at the French front.	
1915		Suprematism Manifesto.		Arp in Zurich. His first abstract works.
1916		Kandinsky returns to Moscow.	Death of Franz Marc at the French front.	Birth of dadaism. Sophie Taeuber's first abstract works.
1917		Gabo and Pevsner in Moscow.		Dada publications. Janco's polychrome reliefs.
1918	Death of Apollinaire.			<i>Duo-collages</i> of Sophie Taeuber and Arp. Tzara's lecture on abstract art in Kunsthaus, Zurich.
1919	Freundlich's first abstract works. Mondrian's return to Paris	Lissitzky : <i>Proum</i> Kandinsky given a professorship at the Moscow Academie.	Founding of the Bauhaus at Weimar. Dada demonstrations in Cologne and Berlin. Arp with Max Ernst in Cologne.	Picabia in Zurich. Dada demonstration at the Salle Kaufleuten in Zurich



HOLLAND	U.S.A.	BELGIUM	
Mondrian works in Zeeland and exhibits with Sluyters in Amsterdam.		Abstract pastels by Lacasse.	1910
Mondrian leaves for Paris at the end of December.		Schmalzigaug has friendly contacts with futurists in Italy.	1911
			1912
	Armory Show. Picabia and Marcel Duchamp in New York.		1913
July : Mondrian returns to Holland.	Publication of 291.	Vantongerloo interned of war in Holland.	1914
Mondrian : large abstract drawings. His first meeting with van Doesburg.	W.H. Wright : <i>Modern Painting, its tendency and meaning.</i>		1915
Mondrian and van der Leek meet in the village of Laren. First abstract works by Huszar and van Doesburg.		Marthe Donas in Paris.	1916
October : first issue of <i>De Stijl</i> . First abstract works by Vantongerloo.	Macdonald-Wright show at Steiglitz.	Vantongerloo meets van Doesburg at the Hague. Servranckx's paintings approach abstraction. Near-abstract cubism of Marthe Donas. Lecture by Jos Léonard : <i>Neo-impressionisme, cubisme, futurisme et orphisme.</i>	1917
Some of Mondrian's abstract works acquired by the Kröller collection (later Kröller-Müller Museum).		Peeters and Van Doren found the Cercle d'Art Moderne in Antwerp. Articles by Van Ostaijen in <i>De Stroom</i> .	1918
Essays by Mondrian in <i>De Stijl</i> . Essays by van Doesburg at various Dutch publishers.		First abstract works by Peeters. Vantongerloo in Brussels.	1919

	FRANCE	RUSSIA	GERMANY	SWITZERLAND
1920	First issue of <i>Esprit Nouveau</i> . Mondrian : <i>Neo-plasticism</i> . Arp and Tzara in Paris.	Gabo's and Pevsner's <i>Realist Manifesto</i> .	Klee given a professorship at the Bauhaus. Publication of Mart's letters and drawings. Moholy-Nagy meets Lissitzky.	
1921	Dadaist demonstrations in Paris.	Constructivist Exhibition. Abstract art falls into disfavor : exodus of the artists.	van Doesburg at the Bauhaus. Moholy-Nagy's first abstract works. Abstract films by Eggeling and Richter,	
1922			Kandinsky given a professorship at the Bauhaus. Marinetti and Prampolini in Berlin.	
1923	Pevsner in Paris. <i>De Stijl</i> Exhibition at Léonce Rosenberg's.		Schwitters publishes the review <i>Merz</i> . Richter and Lissitzky publish <i>G</i> ( <i>Gestaltung</i> ).	
1924	Léger : <i>Mechanical Ballet</i> .		Walden : <i>Einblick in Kunst</i> . Der Sturm publishes a number devoted to modern art in Flanders.	
1925	<i>L'Art d'Aujourd'hui</i> exhibition.		Mondrian : <i>Neue Gestaltung</i> . Kiepenheuer : <i>Europa Almanach</i> .	Arp and Lissitzky publish <i>Les Ismes de l'art</i> .
1926	First issue of <i>Cahiers d'art</i> . Katherine Dreier at Mondrian's. Diaghilev's production of <i>La Chatte</i> by Gabo and Pevsner.		The Bauhaus is set up in Dessau. Kandinsky : <i>Punkt und Linie zu Fläche</i> .	The review <i>Das Werk</i> publishes <i>Die neue Welt</i> .
1927	Vantongerloo in Paris. Dermée and Seuphor : <i>Documents Internationaux de l'Esprit Nouveau</i> . Evenings at the <i>Sacre du Printemps</i> .		Malevitch : <i>Die Gegenstandslose Welt</i> . Opening of an abstract art room at the Hanover Museum.	



HOLLAND	U S A	BELGIUM	
	Founding of the <i>Société Anonyme</i> by Katherine Dreier with the cooperation of Marcel Duchamp and Man Ray.	Marthe Donas exhibits in Berlin (Der Sturm gallery) First congress of modern art in Antwerp. van Doesburg : lecture in Brussels	1920
van Doesburg : <i>Classique, baroque, moderne.</i>		First issue of <i>Het Overzicht</i> . van Doesburg : lectures in Antwerp and Brussels Van Ostaijen : <i>Bezette Stad</i> .	1921
Schwitters in Holland. van Doesburg publishes <i>Mecano</i> .		Second and third congress of modern art in Antwerp and Bruges. Abstract art exhibition in Antwerp. Peeters and Seuphor in Berlin. First issue of <i>Sept Arts</i> Joostens's abstract assemblages	1922
Werkman's first abstract monotypes in Groningue.	W.H. Wright : <i>The Future of Painting</i> .	Participation by Belgian abstract painters in an exhibition at the <i>Lanterne sourde</i> , Brussels. Seuphor travels to Paris and Holland. Henry Van de Velde: <i>Formules d'une esthétique nouvelle</i> .	1923
van Doesburg launches <i>L'Elémentarisme</i> . Mondrian breaks off his association with <i>De Stijl</i> .	Klee exhibition at the <i>Société Anonyme</i> .	Vantongerloo publishes <i>L'Art et son Avenir</i> . Seuphor : <i>Carnet bric-à-brac</i> . Van de Velde in Belgium. Servranckx exhibits in Brussels. Joostens and Seuphor in Paris. Monochrome painting by Servranckx.	1924
		Lacasse and Seuphor settle permanently in Paris. Peeters publishes <i>De Driehoek</i> . Willem de Kooning in Brussels.	1925
Werkman publishes <i>The next Call</i> and develops his abstract monotypes.	Abstract art exhibit at the Brooklyn Museum, New York.	Peeters stops painting. Seuphor publishes <i>Diaphragme intérieur et un Drapeau</i> in Paris.	1926
First issues of the review 1-10.	<i>Gallery of Living Art</i> (Galatin collection) opened to the public at the New York University.	Surrealising paintings by Servranckx.	1927

	FRANCE	RUSSIA	GERMANY	SWITZERLAND
1928	Decorating of the <i>Aubette</i> in Strasbourg (Arp, van Doesburg and Sophie Taeuber).	Lissitzky returns to Moscow.		
1929	Forming of the <i>Cercle et Carré</i> group. Vordemberge-Gildewart exhibit.			
1930	<i>Cercle et Carré</i> Exhibition and art review. van Doesburg : <i>Art concret</i> .			
1931	Delaunay's new <i>Abstract Rhythms</i> . <i>Cahiers d'art : De l'art abstrait</i> .		Kandinsky exhibit in Berlin.	Death of van Doesburg in Davos. Arp exhibits at the Kunsthalle in Basel.
1932	First album of the <i>Abstraction-Création</i> group.			
1933	Kandinsky and Domela come to live in Paris.		Closing of the Bauhaus. Abstract art in disfavor (degenerate art). Exodus of the artists.	
1935	Delaunay: <i>Endless Rhythms</i> (Rythmes sans fin). Reth Exhibition.	Death of Malevitch in Leningrad.		
1936	Magnelli comes back to abstraction.			<i>Die Allianz</i> exhibition in Zurich.
1937	Arp and Sophie Taeuber published the review <i>Plastique</i> .		The Nazis destroy the abstract art room at the Hannover Museum.	Vordemberge-Gildewart in Zurich. <i>Konstruktivisten</i> exhibit in Basel.
1938	Freundlich Exhibition. Mondrian leaves for London. Zervos : <i>Histoire de l'art contemporain</i> .			<i>Die Allianz</i> exhibition in Basel.



HOLLAND	U.S.A.	BELGIUM	
		Van Ostaijen : <i>Het eerste boek van Schmoll</i> Death of Van Ostaijen. Seuphor publishes <i>Lecture Elementaire</i> in Paris. <i>Sept Arts</i> ceases publication. Servranckx exhibits in Berlin (Der Sturm gallery). Seuphor's survey trip through Flanders.	1928    1929
		Engel-Pak's first abstract (non-formal) works.	1930
		The Haesaerts brothers publish <i>Flandre</i> in Paris.	1931
		Seuphor : <i>Un renouveau de la peinture en Belgique flamande</i> .	1932
	Héliou : <i>The Evolution of Abstract Art</i> (Gallatin).	In Brussels, <i>Sélection</i> publishes monographs on Kandinsky and Baumeister.	1933
Bendien : <i>Richtingen in de Hedendaagsche Schilderkunst</i> .	American Abstract Art at the Whitney Museum, New York.	Servranckx exhibit.	1935
	Alfred Barr : <i>Cubism and Abstract Art</i> . Founding of the Association of American Abstract Artists. Moholy-Nagy lay the foundation of a new Bauhaus in Chicago. Start of the Guggenheim Foundation.	Servranckx exhibits in Prague, Budapest, Brno and Bratislava. Servranckx's murals at the Salon de la radio.	1936
			1937
Abstracte Kunst exhibition at the Stedelijk Museum of Amsterdam.			1938

	FRANCE	RUSSIA	GERMANY	SWITZERLAND
1940				The <i>Allianz</i> illustrated almanach.
1941	Death of Delaunay.	Death of Lissitzky in Moscow.		
1942				
1943				Death of Sophie Taeuber in Zurich.
1944	Death of Kandinsky.			<i>Konkrete Kunst</i> exhibit at the Basel Kunsthalle.
1945	<i>Art Concret</i> exhibition at the Drouin Gallery.			
1946	First <i>Salon des Réalités Nouvelles</i> . First exhibition of abstract art at the Denise René Gallery.			Max Bill exhibit in Zurich.
1947	Magnelli Exhibition. Delaunay retrospective at the Galerie Carré.		Domnick : <i>Abstrakte Malerei</i> . Baumeister : <i>Das Unbekannte in der Kunst</i> .	Mondrian retrospective in Basel. <i>Die Allianz</i> at the Kunsthaus in Zurich.
1948	Exhibitions of abstract art at the Galerie des Deux-Iles.		Traveling Exhibition of French abstract painting. Albers, Arp, Bill exhibit.	Monograph on Sophie Taeuber.
1949	Seuphor : <i>L'Art abstrait, ses origines, ses premiers maîtres</i> . Galerie Maeght : <i>Les Premiers Maîtres de l'Art abstrait</i> . First issue of <i>L'Art d'Aujourd'hui</i> .		Blaue Reiter retrospective. Traveling exhibit of Swiss abstract art.	Pevsner, Bill, Vantongerloo Exhibition, Zurich.



HOLLAND	U S A	BELGIUM	
Vordemberge-Gildewart settles in Amsterdam.	Mondrian comes to New York. The Museum of Modern Art sets up quarters in its present building.		1940
			1941
	Peggy Guggenheim : <i>Art of this century.</i> Helena Rubinstein : <i>Masters of Abstract Art.</i>		1942
	Mondrian exhibition at the Valentine Gallery (Dudensing).		1943
	Death of Mondrian. Janis : <i>Abstract and Surrealist Art in America.</i>		1944
Werkman shot by the Nazis.	Mondrian retrospective at the New York Museum of Modern Art. <i>Essays by Mondrian (Wittenborn).</i>	Exhibition by young French painters in Brussels. Founding of the Jeune Peinture Belge group in Brussels and of the A.P.I.A.W. in Liège.	1945
Great Mondrian retrospective show in Amsterdam.	Death of Moholy-Nagy. Kandinsky Exhibition at the Carnegie Institute.	First abstract works of Delahaut. Servranckx and Herbin exhibit at Brussels (Galerie Apollo).	1946
	Moholy-Nagy : <i>Vision in Motion</i> (posthumus work).	Engel-Pak exhibits in Brussels and Liège. Kandinsky gouaches and water-colors in Liège and in La Louvière. Servranckx exhibits in Brussels.	1947
Kandinsky traveling exhibit. A group of abstract painters publish <i>Vrij beelden</i> .	Death of Arshile Gorky. Hitchcock : <i>Painting toward Architecture.</i> Arp : <i>On my way.</i>	Jean Bazaine lectures in Brussels. Klee retrospective in Brussels.	1948
	Leepa : <i>The Challenge of Modern Art.</i> Arp in New York.	First abstract works by Van Lint, Mortier, Gaston Bertrand, Anne Bonnet, Jean Milo, Paul Bury. Marthe Donas exhibition in Brussels.	1949

	FRANCE	RUSSIA	GERMANY	SWITZERLAND
1950	Numerous exhibits of abstract art at the Denise René, Colette Allendy, Deux-Iles, Maeght and other galleries.		Franz Marc retrospective. Bauhaus painters' exhibit in Munich.	
1951	Tapié: <i>Véhémences confrontées</i> . Death of Wols. Art d'Aujourd'hui: <i>La Peinture aux U.S.A.</i> Founding of the <i>Espace</i> group.		Fritz Winter traveling exhibit.	
1952	<i>Témoignages pour l'Art Abstrait</i> . American abstracts at the Galerie de France. Glärner at the Galerie Carré.		Fleischmann exhibit in Stuttgart. Numerous other exhibits of abstract painters.	
1953	Young Americans in Paris at the Craven Gallery. Death of Picabia.			
1954	The <i>Espace</i> group exhibits at Biot. Non-formal art exhibitions at the Galerie Rive-Droite. Seuphor: <i>Dessins à lacunes</i> at Berggruen's.		Great Baumeister retrospective at Stuttgart. Arp - Sophie Taeuber exhibit at Hanover.	French abstract painters at the Berne Museum. Sophie Taeuber retrospective.
1955	Ben Nicholson at the Musée d'Art Moderne. Tobey at the Galerie Jeanne Bucher. Schwitters's collages at Berggruen's. Death of De Staël.		Hochschule für Gestaltung (new Bauhaus) opens at Ulm. Death of Baumeister in Stuttgart. <i>Documenta</i> exhibit in Kassel.	Mondrian retrospective in Zurich.
1956	Japanese Calligraphs at the Cernuschi Museum. Hartung and Soulages at the Galerie de France. Seuphor: <i>Piet Mondrian, sa vie, son œuvre</i> .	A number of young painters unobtrusively start painting abstract works which travelers from abroad are able to photograph.	Vasarely exhibition in Cologne. Poem-paintings at Wuppertal. Seuphor: <i>Piet Mondrian, Leben und Werk</i> .	Arp and Schwitters at the Kunsthalle in Berne.



HOLLAND	U.S.A.	BELGIUM	
A Mondrian room is opened at the Hague Municipal Museum.	Exhibition of French abstract painters at the Galerie Carré, New York. Seuphor in New York.	First open-air sculpture exhibit at Middelheim (Antwerp).	1950
<i>De Stijl</i> retrospective show at the Stedelijk Museum.	Ritchie : <i>Abstract painting and sculpture in America</i> . Hess : <i>Abstract Painting</i> .	Exhibition given by the Cobra group in Liège. Anne Bonnet in Brussels and Liège. First issues of the review <i>De Meridiaan</i> .	1951
	Death of Gallatin. Wittenborn publishes <i>Modern Artists in America</i> .	Founding of the "Art Abstrait" group (Burssens, Bury, Carrey, Hauror, Delahaut, Collignon, Milo, Jan Saverys, Plomteux). Félix De Boeck retrospective in Brussels.	1952
	Death of Morgan Russell. Death of Tomlin.	Arp and Sophie Taeuber exhibit in Brussels and Liège and a lecture by Seuphor : <i>Mission spirituelle de l'art</i> . The "Art Abstrait" group exhibits in Ghent, Brussels, etc. Domnick collection at the "Palais des Beaux-Arts".	1953
Argentine abstract painters at the Stedelijk Museum.	Exhibits of European and American abstract art at the Guggenheim Museum. Macdonald-Wright returns to abstraction.	The <i>First Belgian Abstracts</i> at the Galerie Saint-Laurent, Brussels. Palais des Beaux-Arts : Magnelli, Vasarely, Hartung exhibits. The <i>spatialisme</i> manifesto signed by Bury, Delahaut, Elnó and Séaux. Joostens retrospective in Antwerp.	1954
Mondrian retrospective at the Hague Museum and lecture by Seuphor: <i>Humanisme de Mondrian</i> . Five American abstract painters at the Stedelijk Museum.	Robert Delaunay retrospective at the Guggenheim Museum. Sonia Delaunay at the Rose Fried Gallery.	Delaunay exhibition in Liège.	1955
In Amsterdam, the new group <i>Nieuw Beelden</i> works closely with architects.	Death of Pollock. Seuphor : <i>Piet Mondrian, life and work</i> .	First issue of <i>Quadrum</i> . Peeters goes back to painting. Palais des Beaux-Arts : Herbin and Schwitters exhibit. Founding of the "Formes" group (Bilcke, Delahaut and Séaux).	1956

	FRANCE	RUSSIA	GERMANY	SWITZERLAND
1957	Galerie Creuze : 50 years of abstract painting. Saint-Etienne : Abstract art, the first generations. Seuphor : <i>Dictionnaire de la peinture abstraite</i> . Death of Kupka and Brancusi.	In Paris, Daniel Cordier exhibits the works of a clandestine abstract painter from Leningrad.	Munich : the Munter collection of Kandinsky's works. Seuphor : <i>Lexikon abstrakter Malerei</i> .	<i>Abstract Painting in Switzerland</i> , in Neuchâtel.
1958	Dutch painters at the Musée d'Art Moderne in Paris. Inauguration of UNESCO building.	Exhibit of Polish abstract art in Moscow.	Grohmann : <i>Kandinsky, Leben und Werk</i> . Arp, Sophie Taeuber, Seuphor exhibition in Cologne.	Ben Nicholson settles near Ascona. Sculpture exhibit in Bienne.
1959	Bissière at the Musée d'Art Moderne. Spanish abstract painters at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs. First Biennial of the <i>Jeune Peinture</i> .		<i>Documenta II</i> at Kassel. Exhibit of the Denise René group at Leverkusen.	Neuchâtel : Seuphor's <i>La Sculpture de ce siècle</i> . Ben Nicholson exhibition, Zurich.
1960	Les Sources du XX <sup>e</sup> Siècle at the Musée d'Art Moderne. Death of Herbin and Atlan.		Frankfort : <i>Russian contribution to Modern Art</i> . Arp traveling exhibit. Lardera exhibition in Hamburg.	Skira publishes <i>Les Tendances contemporaines</i> by Nello Ponente. <i>Konkrete Kunst</i> exhibition in Zurich.
1961	Tobey at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs. Reconstruction of Brancusi's studio at the Musée d'Art Moderne. <i>Art Construit International</i> at the Galerie Denise René.		Werkman exhibition in Bochum. <i>Der Sturm</i> retrospective in Berlin.	Tobey exhibits in Basel.
1962	Arp at the Musée d'Art Moderne. Sonia Delaunay at the Galerie Denise René. Seuphor : <i>La Peinture abstraite, sa genèse, son expansion</i> . Death of Pevsner	Abstract works exhibited at Moscow are stigmatized as "art bourgeois, degenerated".	Constructed Abstract Art exhibit in Leverkusen. Death of Vordemberge-Gildewart in Ulm.	Arp exhibition in Basel Retrospective of Arp's drawings and collages in Berne.



HOLLAND	U.S.A.	BELGIUM	
Abstract expressionism at the Stedelijk Museum. Young Belgian and Dutch painters at the Hague Municipal Museum.	The American Abstract Artists group publishes <i>The World of Abstract Art</i> . Seuphor : <i>Dictionary of Abstract Painting</i> .	Knokke : <i>Esthétique d'aujourd'hui</i> exhibition. Seuphor lectures in Antwerp : <i>Mondrian l'inactuel</i> . Klee and Kandinsky exhibitions in Brussels.	1957
Death of van der Leek in Blaricum.	Arp exhibit at the Museum of Modern Art.	50 ans d'art moderne at the Universal Exposition in Brussels. Opening of the Hessenhuis attic in Antwerp. Malevitch exhibit in Brussels - Burssens in New York.	1958
		First Belgian abstracts at the Hessenhuis. Founding of the Axe 59 group in Namur.	1959
	Chalette Gallery : <i>Construction and Geometry in Painting</i> , and Arp - Sophie Taeuber exhibition. Arp - Mondrian show at the Sidney Janis Gallery.	Death of Anne Bonnet and Jozef Peeters. <i>Art Construit International</i> at the Ixelles Museum. Gorin exhibit in Liège. Belgian exhibition in New York. Paul Haesaerts : <i>Histoire de la peinture moderne en Flandre</i> .	1960
<i>Le Mouvement</i> (bewogen beweging) at the Stedelijk Museum. Inauguration of a sculpture garden at the Kröller-Müller Museum.	American abstract painters at the Guggenheim Museum, New York.	Walravens : <i>La Peinture contemporaine en Belgique</i> . Seuphor lecture : <i>La notion d'architecture dans la peinture contemporaine</i> in Bruges, Ghent and Brussels. Death of Van Anderlecht in Brussels. Marc Rothko exhibit in Brussels.	1961
The Zéro and the <i>Construction expérimentale</i> Exhibitions at the Stedelijk Museum.	Death of Franz Kline. Seuphor : <i>Abstract Painting, fifty years of accomplishment</i> .	In Ghent : <i>Forum</i> and Jan Burssens exhibitions. Ostend : Landuyt exhibit. The abstract art is defended by Renotte, a communist from Liège, in his book : <i>L'Art est une chose importante</i> .	1962





PART TWO

BIOGRAPHIES AND COMMENTARIES

BY

MAURITS BILCKE, LÉON-LOUIS SOSSET

AND

JAN WALRAVENS





## VAN DE VELDE, HENRY

Born in Antwerp in 1863, died in Obergeri, in the Swiss Oberland, in 1957.

A pioneer in the history of architecture and the applied arts. — Painting was his first vocation. — In 1881 he attended the Antwerp Academy of Fine Arts. — He underwent the influence of the landscapist A.J. Heymans, evolved in the wake of van Gogh, then of Seurat.

BIBLIOGRAPHY : His Memoirs, written during the last years of his life, were published in 1962 by Piper, in Munich, under the editorship of Dr. Hans Curjel.

About 1893, HENRY VAN DE VELDE executed the unusual pastel reproduced as the frontispiece to the present work, entitled *Abstraction* in the catalogue of the Kröller-Müller Rijksmuseum of Otterlo to which it belongs. In the delicate tracery of its linear arabesque can be discerned a premonitory attempt, already very far-reaching, at the abstract transposition of the motif. After the example of the Englishman William Morris, Henry Van de Velde later became concerned with the social function of art. He generously developed the themes of the modern style in all fields of decoration : furniture, textiles, household objects, jewels, illustrations, bindings. Appointed to the directorship of the Institute of Decorative Arts of Weimar (1902-1914), and then of the Institut National Supérieur d'Architecture et des Arts Décoratifs (I.N.S.A.A.D.) in Brussels (1926-1943), he used his considerable influence to steer the disciplines relating to architecture and indus-

trial forms in the direction of rigor and functional purity.

In the course of his teaching career Van de Velde produced a number of works on aesthetic theory — *Formules de la beauté architectonique moderne, Pages de doctrine, Vie et mort de la colonne*, etc. His bold ventures, backed by intelligence and enthusiasm, can be viewed as the successive acts of a lifelong apostleship. Neither setbacks nor reverses nor lack of public understanding dampened his energy. The international interest aroused by his achievements emphasizes the influence exerted on several generations.

Formally, his style ranged from the arabesques with their capricious lines of the 1900 period to the orthogonal forms which dictated the fundamental rhythms of his buildings, thirty years later well exemplified in *The Old Age Home* in Hanover.

## DE TROYER, PROSPER

Born in Destelbergen, December 26, 1880. Died in Malines (Clinique Duffel), June 1, 1961. Studied at the Ecole Saint-Luc d'Oostakker and at the Mechlin Academy.

1914 : First exhibit in Brussels. — 1918-1919 : Cubist and futurist works. Correspondence with Marinetti. — 1920-1921 : Abstract compositions entitled « Suprematische vlakschildering ». — 1922 : Turned toward expressionism to which he remained faithful until his death.

BIBLIOGRAPHY : Book of tribute : « Kunstschilder Prosper de Troyer zestig jaar », Ed. Pro Arte, Diest, 1941. — Georges

PROSPER DE TROYER turned definitively to figurative expressionism, after having assimilated the contributions of various -isms of the beginning of the century : neo-impressionism, fauvism, futurism, and neo-plasticism. Influenced by futurism — above all by his correspondence with Marinetti — he painted, in this trend, a certain number of characteristic canvases, of which *La Couturière* and *La Fête* (both dated 1920) are among the best examples. The second of these already then foreshadowed an irresistible evolution toward absolute abstract composition.

De Troyer came to it in 1920 in a few paintings in which he applied what Malevitch in 1915 had called *supremely plane painting*. In 1921, De Troyer executed a few canvases which he entitled *Plastique pure*. They are compositions remarkable for their purity and simplicity : vertical and horizontal planes, circles and fragments of circles, secants; smooth coats of color, a limited palette. Within this willed limitation one senses a strong will, a great sense of form and structure, a feeling for what is static once and for all, a predilection for immobile rhythms.

Most of the critics of the period, like, for example, Georges Marlier in 1912, saw in this *supremely plane painting* nothing more than "decorative panels, which could be used in a renovated architecture". Thinking of Van Eyck, we should not dare to claim, as do the critics in question, that abstract art in no way corresponds to the Flemish temperament. However this may be, De Troyer soon turned away from abstract painting. In this he scarcely differed from the other abstractionists of the first generation who remained in Belgium. Servranckx was a lone exception. In connection with a survey made in October 1954, on the occasion of the exhibition devoted to the first generation of Belgian abstract painters at the Galerie Saint-Laurent, De Troyer, in *De Periscoop*, wrote the following significant lines : "Here we have finally come to zero : *the abstract*. Art bears witness, it is a profession of faith in life, it is the most concrete possible." This opinion does not alter the fact that, having reached zero, De Troyer painted some of his finest canvases, if not the best in his whole work. Unfortunately, his advisers and friends had eyes only for the paintings that conformed to the doctrine of the *volksverbunden Kunst*, and De Troyer had great respect for their opinion. This perhaps explains why his abstract canvases are so very rare. We can add only a single word : alas !

## DAENENS, ALBERT

Born in Brussels February 27, 1883. Died in Uccle, August 25, 1952.

Participated in abstract art exhibitions, among others in Brussels, Antwerp and Geneva. — Founder of the review « Haro » (1921).

ALBERT DAENENS, immediately after the First World War, participated in all the modernist movements of the time. He was the editor of *avant-garde* reviews which made a great stir, and the engraver of prints in which, under the influence of Frans Masereel, he attacked militarism and war. Witnesses claim that among the works that he exhibited in Brussels, Antwerp and Geneva there were abstract canvases. However this may be, he was certainly closely involved in the birth of non-figurative art in Brussels. To be convinced of this one need only thumb through the pages of the review *Sept Arts*, which was edited by Pierre and Victor Bourgeois. We have been able to track down none of Albert Daenens' abstract canvases : the present note has therefore only a purely historic interest.

## ENGEL-PAK, ERNEST

Born in Spa in 1885.

Settled in Paris in 1924 and there exhibited for the first time two years later, under the name of Engel-Hozier. — Giving up expressionism in 1927 under the influence of Torrès-Garcia, he evolved by rapid stages toward non-figurative painting. — Was a member of the Abstraction-Création group (1931) and exhibited side by side with Arp, Mondrian, Delaunay, Vantongerloo, Kupka, etc. — Settled in Sanary (Var) in 1934 and there led for ten years the life of a painter-peasant. — Renewed contact with artistic activity in 1946. — At this time showed his work in France and in Belgium. — Made color illustrations for Paul Eluard's « Objets des mots et des images » (1947). — Then retired to Bandol (Var). — He is now conservator of King René's hunting pavilion in Valabre near Aix-en-Provence.

ERNEST ENGEL-PAK belongs to the host of obscure pioneers who endowed the aesthetics of abstraction with a considerable repertory of accompaniments. Having long been available to the adventure of painting, he refused to represent the appearance of things, and this without exposing himself to the reproach that such refusal froze his inspiration. Attached to life, and like life ever in the process of becoming, the free and fertile nature of his art cannot be justified by any





54.  
Prosper DE TROYER  
The feast, 1920  
220 x 140, oil on linen.  
Private collection.

operation of reason. It was along this line that criticism tried to account for him, as early as 1930, when he was beginning to practice a painting without lines or forms, composed exclusively of juxtaposed spots of color. Appropriating the sensations of instinct and the audacities of improvisation, Engel-Pak's paintings take on the character of imprecision and indeterminacy specific to a certain abstract lyricism whose resources he intuitively perceived, at a moment when this conception, isolated from any approved discipline, was frowned upon because of its informality and was consequently neglected. Dynamic morphologies and animated colors convey the impulses of an independent spirit, which gives full powers to the act of effusion, without ever attempting to exploit or canalize its singularities.

## DONAS, MARTHE

Surnamed Tour Donas in « Der Sturm » and Tour d'Onasky in « De Stijl », Marthe Donas was born in Antwerp October 26, 1885. A student at the academy of her native town in 1902 and in 1903. Fleeing before the German invasion in 1914, she took refuge in Holland. 1915 : Worked in the studio of Miss Purcell, glass-work artist in Dublin, Ireland. Late 1916 : In Paris, attended the Grande Chaumière Academy for two months. January 1917 : Studied at the Ranson Academy for one month. Visited an exhibit of the works of André Lhote. Discovered Cubism. Painted Cubist and abstract canvases. Met Archipenko. February 1917 : Worked in André Lhote's studio for one month. Lacking money, she gave this up and attached herself to Madame de L., to whom she taught painting and whom she accompanied to Nice.

Early 1919 : Paris. — Member of « La Section d'Or » : group exhibits in September 1919 in London, in March 1920 at the Galerie La Boétie in Paris, in 1921 in Rome, London, Brussels and other European and American cities. — Short of funds, she returned to Antwerp. — Late 1919 : First single-artist exhibit at the Librairie Kundig in Geneva (40 canvases). — February 1920 : Exhibited with Nell Walden, Franz Marc and Y. Paul at the Der Sturm gallery in Berlin. Herwarth Walden bought 35 of her paintings. — Exhibits at the Salon des Indépendants in Paris. — Spent three months in London, where she painted portraits. — Left for Paris. — Fell ill and gave up her studio on the rue du Départ to Piet Mondrian. — Returned to Antwerp. — January 1922 : Married Harry Franke van Meir in Paris. February : seriously ill. July : returned to Belgium. — 1926 : Exhibited with the Assaut group in Brussels. July 1926 : Single-artist show at the Vierge Poupine gallery, directed by Geert van Bruane. December 1926 : Exhibited at the Cercle Artistique (Brussels). — Late 1927 : Gave up painting. — Inactive for 20 years. — October 1947 : Took up painting again. — 1949 : Exhibited at the Galerie Apollo in Brussels. — 1954 : Again painted abstract canvases. May-June : Exhibited at the Cercle Français (Brussels) 10 figurative and 10 abstract works. — July 1958 : Exhibited 31 canvases, executed between 1957 and 1958, called « Intuitions » and representing abstract compositions. — November 1960 : Single-artist exhibition at the Palais des Beaux-Arts in Brussels.

REPRODUCTIONS : « De Stijl », 2nd year, No. 6, 1918-1919 : a cubist still life, dated 1917 and signed Tour d'Onasky. — « De Stijl », 2d year, No. 8, 1918-1919 : A 1918 canvas signed Tour d'Onasky. — « Der Sturm », 1920, fly-leaf : abstract drawing. — Herwarth Walden « Einblick in Kunst », 1924 (3rd edition) : Two reproductions in black and white and one in color.

MARTHE DONAS (known also as Tour Donas and Tour d'Onasky) attended courses at the Academy of Antwerp, her native city, for only three years, but with great success. When the First World War broke out in 1914, she sought refuge in Ireland, after finding a temporary haven in the Netherlands, and arrived in Dublin, where she enrolled in the Art School for stained-glass. Shortly after this, she worked as a collaborator in the studio of Miss Purcell, where she executed three large stained-glass windows for Irish churches. Her earnings from these commissions enabled her to go to Paris in 1916. Cubism made a deep impression on her. She studied at the Grande Chaumière Academy and at the Ranson Academy, and worked besides in the studios of André Lhote and Archipenko.

Convinced that a feminine first name was likely to discourage possible buyers, she signed her first cubist canvas, a still life composed in 1917, with the name of "Tour Donas". Theo van Doesburg was to change this name to "Tour d'Onasky".

The artist soon struck up friendships with a number of eminent painters. She became a member of the Section d'Or, and participated in group exhibitions in London in September 1919, in Paris at the Galerie La Boétie March 5, 1920, in Brussels December 4, 1920, under the aegis of Sélection, and later in Rome and in America. Her canvases appeared alongside those of Gleizes, Kupka, Larionov, Léger, Marcoussis, Villon, Braque, Archipenko, Brancusi, Laurens, and Duchamp.

The work of Marthe Donas attracted the interest of Theo van Doesburg, who, in the review *De Stijl* (II, 6, 1918-1919), published a reproduction of a cubist canvas dated 1917, and, in No. 8 of the same year, a canvas of 1918, both signed "Tour d'Onasky". The review said of her : "Her works can be rated among the best in modern art".

Marthe Donas's first one-man show was given in Geneva, at the Kundig Bookshop, Place du Lac, from December 15, 1919 to January 1, 1920. The catalogue mentioned an important series of cubist and abstract canvases. It was already pointed out that her work differed markedly from that of other cubists. A. R. wrote in *La Feuille* : "There is a charm in Tour Donas's work to which the painters of her school have not accustomed us. Artists like Fernand Léger, Chagall, or Delaunay are





55.  
Ernest ENGEL-PAK  
Composition 6, 1956  
22 x 35, oil on wood.  
M.S. collection, Paris.

much more severe, and they usually paint in broad planes. An attenuated light, blurred, as it were, and dream-like, frequently bathes the objects and the faces that Tour Donas reveals to us." As we see, the typically feminine character of the painter did not escape the critic.

Herwarth Walden in his turn discovered the Antwerp painter. In 1920 he invited her to exhibit, together with Nell Walden, in his famous Berlin gallery *Der Sturm*. The show was a spectacular success and provoked indignant articles from adversaries of modern art. The result was that Walden bought all the exhibited works. Moreover, he published, in 1920, an abstract drawing by Marthe Donas on the title-page of the

review *Der Sturm* (XII, 2). His work, *Einblick in Kunst* (3rd edition, in 1924), which has become famous, contains three reproductions, including one in color, of paintings by Marthe Donas dated 1918 — a privilege she shares with Franz Marc and Bela Kadar.

Marthe Donas very soon broke with the usual technique of oil painting. She pursued exciting investigations in the fields of materials, of relief and collage. We read the following comment about these experiments of hers in the Paris review *Revue du vrai et du beau*, dated March 25, 1923: "She carries out experiments in the most modern interpretations of art. An impassioned experimenter, she has attempted to imitate sculptures on canvas; she glues various materials (fabrics, etc.) on



56.  
Marthe DONAS  
Composition 5, 1920  
63 x 48, oil on cartoon.  
Private collection.





57.  
Marthe DONAS  
Composition 6, 1920  
63 x 48, oil on wood.  
Private collection.

pieces of pasteboard which she then paints; thereupon she cuts out the silhouette of her drawings and applies them to the canvas with a cement which she herself prepares. All her efforts are directed to a synthesis and the evocation of an idea superior to the material object she wants to present." The abstract canvases of the years 1917-1918 were the outgrowth of the same desire for synthesis.

The two works painted in 1920 which we reproduce here show that the artist at that time was developing in a direction which, on the one hand, was separating her from cubism, and, on the other, was bringing her closer, in a certain sense, to purism, of which the manifesto, written by Ozenfant and Jeanneret (Le Corbusier), had appeared in 1918 under the significant title, *After cubism*.

It is very much to be regretted that a great number of Marthe Donas's paintings, dating from the years 1917 to 1922, have been lost. Five of her canvases are in the Yale University Art Gallery, in New Haven, Connecticut, thanks to the famous collectors Miss Dreier and Marcel Duchamp, who have bequeathed to this university all the works of one of the century's most remarkable collections, the Société Anonyme - Museum of Modern Art 1920. We may mention, too, that, in the museum catalogue, Katherine S. Dreier refers to the Antwerp artist as "the first woman abstract painter," and that the five canvases by Marthe Donas that appear in her collection had been bought in 1920 at the Der Sturm gallery from Herwarth Walden.

In 1921, Marthe Donas came back to Antwerp after having ceded her studio on the rue du Départ to Piet Mondrian. In the course of the years 1922 to 1927, we find her once more attaching greater importance to the figurative subject. She continued to stylize the plastic elements in the cubist manner, to treat the flat surface of the canvas with great respect, but a certain naïve poetic quality now appeared in her work.

It is only after silence of twenty years that we come upon her again, in 1949, at the Galerie Apollo, in Brussels. For ten years her work continued to be figurative, but in 1958 she exhibited in the gallery Au Cheval de Verre a series of abstract canvases entitled *Intuitions 1958*, which were startling in their novelty. "What I seek," she wrote, "is the sublime, while at the same seeking rhythm in the compositions, in the color as well as in the lines and the planes. In my last canvases, I give great latitude to the first intuition that I feel. Intuition alone, however, I consider insufficient to perfect a work. I try to dominate it, to organize it. We are

material beings, but with a soul which aspires to rise toward the infinite."

Marthe Donas wrote these lines at the age of 73. Today she remains faithful to them, in canvases that testify to a youthfulness of spirit and a combativeness surprising in an artist of her age. Her abstract work, rich in its diversity, is the product of a very personal inspiration. It bears the mark, moreover, of an eternally youthful femininity, a femininity which, in Marthe Donas's canvases, goes hand in hand with a solid construction and a lyrical touch, and which is too often considered not to be an attribute of the female sex. Among the Flemish women who have made a career of painting, Marthe Donas indisputably occupies a place in the very first rank.

## SCHMALZIGAUG, JULIUS

Born in Antwerp September 26, 1886, died in The Hague May 12, 1917. A pupil of Isidore Verheyen, and, in Paris, of R. Ménard and L. Simon.

In 1911 joined the futurist group in Venice. — Friendship with Marinetti. — The painter Balla has several letters of Schmalzigaug's written in water-color. — The Musée des Beaux-Arts in Antwerp has works by Schmalzigaug.

BIBLIOGRAPHY : Schmalzigaug stayed in Lissewege and it was in the room in which he lived that Michel Seuphor wrote his work « Un renouveau de la peinture en Belgique flamande » in 1929. — Maurits Blicke, *Aujourd'hui*, Vol. 27, June 1960, Paris.

JULIUS SCHMALZIGAUG, whose work is almost totally unknown, would have played an important role in modern Flemish painting if he had not died in 1917, having barely reached the age of thirty. Although his work is not very abundant, it would be wrong to underestimate its importance, for it proves that Schmalzigaug was far ahead of the evolution of modern art in Belgium.

Already in 1911 he allied himself, in Venice, to the group of the futurists. Having become friendly with Marinetti and won the esteem of Italian futurist circles, he influenced the latter in turn. In Belgium he was undeniably the first consciously to apply ideas that were at the very forefront of the plastic *avant-garde*. We are thinking of such canvases as *Dynamism of the Dance*, the title of which is very revealing, and especially of



*Santa Maria della Salute*, a wonderful work which clearly goes beyond futurism and opens on abstract art. Like Severini, Schmalzigaug in this canvas applies a pointillisme which is very reminiscent of Seurat. The idea of movement is very suggestively represented, but by its over-all impression the composition is more static than the very rhythmic composition of *Dynamism of the Dance*, which seems a prefiguration of the present action painting.

Michel Seuphor tells us in his book, *Un renouveau de la peinture en Belgique flamande*, written in 1929 in the room that the young Schmalzigaug occupied in Lis-sewege: "Balla showed me a long series of letters, written in water-color, in various colors. It would be worthwhile publishing these letters some day in a volume, which the public is already looking forward to, and which I should entitle *Annals of -isms since Cézanne*." Like the premature death of Rik Wouters, the passing of Schmalzigaug meant a heavy loss for Flemish painting which was in the process of liberating itself from a suffocating tradition. Both disappeared at a crucial moment of our pictorial evolution and everything indicates that they would have played a leading role in it. The war and its after-effects brutally prevented this.

## VANTONGERLOO, GEORGES

Born in Antwerp November 24, 1886. Studies at the Brussels and Antwerp Academies. Wounded during the First World War, interned in Holland. Teacher to the Baroness Bentinck. 1917 : Made contact with Théo van Doesburg. Co-signer of the First Manifesto of the De Stijl group, published in the review of the same name, II, 2. Wrote for this review from 1917 to 1919. 1917 : First abstract works. 1919 : Stay in Brussels, then in Menton until 1927.

Participated in the first exhibit organized by the Art Moderne group in Antwerp. — 1927 : Settled in Paris. — 1929 : Correspondence with Prime Minister Jaspar regarding a project for a bridge across the Escaut river in Antwerp. — 1930 : Participation in the Cercle et Carré exhibition in Paris. — 1931 : Founded, with Herbin, the Abstraction-Création group of which he was the vice-president from 1931 to 1937. — Until about 1937, followed the fundamental principles advocated by « De Stijl » : the horizontal-vertical composition. — Introduced the curved line into his work from 1937. — Oriented his research toward the « indefinable », at the same time often using as a basis a very complicated geometrical calculation. — 1949 : Group exhibit with Max Bill and Pevsner at the Kunsthau in Zurich, where Vantongerloo showed 60 works. — 1960 : Participated in the Art Concret exhibition at the

Helmhaus in Zurich. — 1961 : Participated in the Belgian section of the Sculpture Biennial in Paris. — Exhibit in honor of Vantongerloo's 75th birthday at the Galerie Suzanne Bollag in Zurich. Catalogue preface by Max Bill.

BIBLIOGRAPHY : 1924 : Published « L'Art et son Avenir », De Sikkell, Antwerp. — Barr, « Cubism and Abstract Art », New York, 1936. — 1948 : Wittenborn, Schultz, Inc., New York, published as a fifth volume of the « Problems of Contemporary Art » series, the work « Georges Vantongerloo : Paintings, Sculptures, Reflections » with a preface by Max Bill and containing numerous texts and reproductions of works by Vantongerloo. — Seuphor, « L'Art abstrait, ses origines, ses premiers maîtres », Paris 1949. — Catalogue for the Art Concret Exhibition in Zurich 1960. — Catalogue for the De Stijl exhibit, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, 1951. — Seuphor, « Dictionnaire de la peinture abstraite », Paris 1957 ; « La Sculpture de ce siècle », Neuchâtel, 1959. — Max Bill, Preface of the catalogue for the exhibition at the Suzanne Bollag's Galerie in Zurich.

GEORGES VANTONGERLOO is one of the few Flemish abstractionists of the first vintage to have acquired a world-wide reputation. Enlisted during the First World War, he took refuge in the Netherlands, where he made contact with van Doesburg. In 1917 the Dutch review *De Stijl* was founded, and that same year Vantongerloo created his first abstract sculptures, of which we shall mention only the two works entitled *Spherical Compositions*, the first of which was composed of curved forms, the second built chiefly by means of straight planes. To this same period also belongs the abstract canvas *Composition*, formed of circles, triangles, and rectangles, and in which the oppositions of colors (positive-negative) produce numerous horizontal-vertical secants and diagonals.

It was obvious that so progressive an artist as Vantongerloo — who in addition had proved himself as a figurative painter — would together with van Doesburg, Van 't Hoff, Huszar, Kok, Mondrian and Wils, sign the First Manifesto of *De Stijl*. The text of it appeared on the second page of the second issue of the year 1918 of the review, which soon had a remarkable distribution and influence.

It may be well to recall that Vantongerloo was several years younger than Mondrian and that his work — as J. J. Vriend emphasized in the weekly *De Groene Amsterdammer* of July 21, 1956 — deeply marked the architectural conceptions of the De Stijl group. Is it not in fact symptomatic that Vantongerloo's abstract sculptures struck a chronicler of *Ons Vaderland*, who, on December 11, 1919, wrote that they rang with the pure music of space ?

Vantongerloo was conscious of the mission that he had to fulfill. In the third issue of *De Stijl*, in fact, he wrote : "It is sometimes claimed that my conception of art is science. What do they mean by science ? Science and



58.  
Georges VANTONGERLOO  
Composition with orange 58  
1929, 59 x 60, oil on linen.  
The Solomon R. Guggenheim  
Museum, New York.

art have the same laws." He could not have defined his artistic conceptions more clearly. Six years later, the pioneer of abstract art developed his ideas in his book *L'Art et son avenir*, which was published by De Sikkel in Antwerp in 1924, and which included the essays written in Brussels and in Menton from 1919 to 1921.

It was in Menton that the artist laid the foundations of his theories, which were the fruit of extensive mathematical research. Since then he has continued steadily to synthesize his research and his experiments, achieving what Max Bill called the work "of one of the most orig-

inal thinkers and artists of our time." Vantongerloo has condensed the fruit of his investigations in absorbing but difficult *Reflections*, published in 1948 in New York, by Wittenborn. The work, entitled *Vantongerloo : Paintings, Sculptures, Reflections*, is the fifth volume of the collection *Problems of Contemporary Art*. Although it is unlikely that in the century of television many readers will have the courage to read Vantongerloo's writings to the end, their theoretical and practical value cannot be underestimated, and the future will undoubtedly fully recognize their importance.



An interesting — and surprising — parallel could be made between Vantongerloo's *Reflections* and the conceptions of the Dutch philosopher M. H. J. Schoenmaekers, author of *Het Nieuwe Wereldbeeld* (1915), and of *Beginnels der Beeldende Wiskunde* (1916). A highly original thinker like Vantongerloo himself, Schoenmaekers, had conceived a neo-Platonic system which he called *positive mysticism* or *plastic mathematics*. Herbert Read calls attention to the fact that "not only did plastic creations by artists like Vantongerloo precede the direction that philosophic conceptions were to take, but that this philosophy was abroad in the air of the period." It is therefore not surprising to find Vantongerloo giving to certain works of this period such titles as *Group 6* =  $ax^2 + bx + c$  or *Construction*  $y = 2x^3 - 13,5x^2 + 21x$ .

Until about 1937, Vantongerloo remained faithful, in his canvases as well as in his sculptures, to a well-defined fundamental principle: the vertical-horizontal rhythm which already characterised the *Interrelation of masses* (Brussels, 1919). It is obvious that these canvases and sculptures have profoundly influenced modern architecture. "Sculpture, painting," the artist wrote, "obey the same laws: unity, balance, and harmony. Full forms and hollow forms determine space." From 1937 on, we shall see Vantongerloo abandon horizontal-vertical construction. He feels liberated, but he nevertheless hopes that no one will on this account consider his work from a different angle. In his canvases we see the curved line appear, and in his sculptures convex forms. But both, as in the past, proceed from mathematical calculations which are at times highly complex. Thus for example the theory of the *infinite* enveloping spirit and matter, light and expression, and seeking to maintain a perfect equilibrium between these various elements. All the characteristics of the infinite are perceptible, but not immediately recognizable. It is up to the sensibility of the artist and of the creator to make the invisible visible. And this is what Vantongerloo does — with what brilliant mastery! — in each of the works that spring from his hands.

For it is in this that Vantongerloo's wonderful originality lies: proceeding from extremely complex scientific and mathematical theories, he created an impressive succession of pictorial and plastic works which are among the most astonishing in our century.

Vantongerloo has experimented with a great variety of materials. In recent years he has often used plexiglas, of which he has exploited the possibilities with great ingenuity. The sun, and not the painter's brush,

heightens the effect of a statuette with prismatic colors. The simplicity of the procedure recalls Columbus's egg, but someone had to have the idea.

The visitor who for the first time enters Vantongerloo's studio — in the impasse du Rouet, in Paris — has the feeling that he is entering a laboratory. And in this he is hardly mistaken. Order and light, calculation and naturalness, simplicity and imagination reign here. What a fresh surprise to rediscover the canvases and the sculptures we admired as a child in the art reviews! Vantongerloo was a pioneer when he was still very young. All his life, he has sought and he has found. Today, at the age of nearly eighty, he remains in the very forefront of the *avant-garde* among inventors and creators.

## CLOSON, HENRI-JEAN

Born in Liège in 1888. 1902: Ecole Saint-Luc in Liège. 1903: Met Mondrian in Holland. 1903-1904: Lived in Aix-la-Chapelle and in Dusseldorf. Met August Macke. 1904: Académie des Beaux-Arts in Liège. 1905: Liège International Exposition. Received visit of August Macke and Le Fauconnier. Closon discovered that the values perceived in reflections in the water can serve to render light in painting. 1914-1918: a soldier, a prisoner, freed on parole by the Germans. 1918: In Paris. Anatole France persuaded him to settle in the French capital. 1920: Visited Claude Monet in Giverny.

1921-1925: Settled in Paris. — Participated in exhibitions at the Palais Grimaldi in Antibes. — 1927-1928: Trip to the Basque country. — 1931: The law of light and shadow contrasts and the juxtaposition of colors led the artist to transcoloration. — 1932: Member of the Abstraction-Création circle. — 1933: Became the owner of a country house in Voiron (Isère). — His experiments in the field of values led him to form and volume. — 1934: First exhibit of abstract paintings, avenue Wagram, Paris. — 1935-1944: Having permanently settled in Voiron, he led an ascetic life until his second marriage in 1944. — Design for silk textiles. — 1938: Participated in the Belgian Art Exhibition at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam. — 1947: An active member of the Salon des Réalités Nouvelles in which he has participated every year. — 1954: The family left Voiron to return to Paris. — 1959: Retrospective in his studio on the avenue Général-Leclerc. — 1961: Retrospective at the Grenoble Museum.

HENRI-JEAN CLOSON is well known not only in artistic circles, but also in circles in which the properties of color are scientifically studied. His passage from the figurative to the abstract was determined by the need to give priority to the rhythms and cadences of colors,

and not to the subjects. In music, counterpoint gives a greater value to the rhythm of the melody. It can in the same way heighten the value of each color on a canvas — which is scarcely true of *chiaroscuro* — and effect a real irradiation of the paint quality. Closon's work is extremely varied and is wholly the product of carefully thought-out studies. This makes the artist difficult to classify in modern art as a whole. It is in a sense the synthesis of an art in search of discoveries and of a science which tends to demonstrate. Bernard Bertry calls Closon "the greatest colorist of our century." We may recall also that Closon's glass statuettes have in recent years had the same success as his canvases.

## JOOSTENS, PAUL

Born June 18, 1889 in Antwerp, where he died March 24, 1960. After having studied at the Jesuit College of his native city, he served an apprenticeship with the architect Max Winders. He subsequently studied at the Antwerp Academy and Institute of Fine Arts.

He took part in group exhibitions and organized one-man shows and retrospectives in Antwerp, Brussels and Warsaw.

BIBLIOGRAPHY : Georges Marlier, « L'Œuvre plastique de Paul Joostens », Ed. Ça ira !, Antwerp, 1923. — Herman Oosterwijk, « Paul Joostens », Ed. Standaard-Boekhandel, Antwerp 1944. — Paul Neuhuys, « Paul Joostens », Coll. Monographies de l'Art Belge, Ed. Elsevier, Brussels, 1962.

Abstraction has a special place in PAUL JOOSTENS's widely ranging work, and this applies both to the production of the revolutionary years that followed the First World War and to that of the last years of his life. Restless and versatile, he explored a great variety of paths and used different materials. He made his debut about 1910 with impressionist canvases which were very sensual in character. But between 1914 and 1918 he had already gone in for *avant-garde* experiments by executing constructions which were sometimes cubist, sometimes expressionist or dadaist. His expressionist paintings, of symbolist tendency, were rarely successful. But his cubist and dadaist works on the other hand, for which he used the most diverse materials, are notable for their balance. Even though the boards, rags, springs, iron bars and even small rubber balls might appear eccentric, they contrived to produce an undeniable impression of calm and harmony.

After 1925, Paul Joostens returned to the figurative, painting an impressive series of prefigurations of *Lolita*, in which he tried, according to Paul Neuhuys, to reconcile the Gothic madonna and the Hollywood star.

In the most complete solitude and destitution, which were to cease only with his life and which at times pushed him to the verge of madness, Joostens executed thousands of drawings, extremely perverse and at times pornographic, but which are unquestionably the most poignant part of his work. He returned to dadaism about 1955, this time no longer by juxtaposing various materials, but by assembling heterogeneous objects. This is an expression, which has no parallel in Belgian painting, of the nausea and the contempt with which life filled him.

Throughout all these aesthetic tribulations, one senses an artist constantly torn between the two poles of his personality. Paul Van Ostaijen had detected them as early as 1918: sensuality and a mystical urge. This was combined with a minute but undeniable ingredient of charlatanism. But neither can one deny that Joostens's resources as a painter fell short of his desire to express concretely the psychological conflict which constituted his drama. This undoubtedly explains why he was not always able to avoid artifice or exposing himself to ridicule.

Strangely enough, when Paul Joostens practiced abstraction, in the strict sense of the word, he escaped his contradictions and his limits. Certain collages and certain non-figurative canvases achieve a pure formal perfection. Paul Neuhuys tells us that his apprenticeship with the architect Winders was of capital importance in the development of the constructivist spirit which was to show itself later in Joostens's work. This spirit comes out most clearly in the abstract work executed in 1922-1923 and taken up again after 1955. For his non-figurative works, Joostens most often chose subdued tonalities which he juxtaposed in large volumes, while keeping the edges of the torn paper light and avoiding forms that were too geometric. He excluded all egocentricity, all literary or symbolic overtones. His works were thus discreet and worthy of respect: a refuge of silence amid a production that was noisy, uneven, but nearly always interesting.

The *Collage* dated 1922 and reproduced here offers an example of this aspect of Joostens's work. Its balanced proportions, its modesty, its coloring and its aristocratic accent make us deeply regret that the artist's enormous production includes only a few achievements of this quality (p. 49).



## KIEMENEIJ, JAN

Born October 30, 1889. Studied at the Antwerp and Malines Academies.

Joined the Antwerp Art Moderne circle in 1921. — Exhibited with this group at the Congrès d'Art Moderne organized in the city. — Created a scandal in 1926 by decorating an Antwerp shop with abstract motifs. — 1927 : Exhibited with Van Dooren, Mortelmans and others at the Vlaamse Kunstkring in Borgerhout. — 1928 : Exhibited with Joostens, Van Dooren, Van Straten and other painters of the Art Moderne circle at the Antwerp Salle des Fêtes. — From 1926 to 1942 was professor at the Ecole professionnelle des arts et métiers in Antwerp. — 1952 : One-man show in Antwerp. — 1959 : Participated in the Premiers Abstraits Belges exhibition at the Hessenhuis in Antwerp.

BIBLIOGRAPHY : « De Gazet van Antwerpen », December 24, 1923. — « Neptune », March 27, 1926.

JAN KIEMENEIJ came to abstract art in the twenties. His approach to it was, on the one hand, by the progressive reduction of the landscape to a few more or less geometric planes of violently contrasting colors which at times evoke for today's viewer certain canvases painted by De Staël, and, on the other hand, by the simplification of the theme of a wood of birch trees to a few broad vertical strokes. Numerous works of this period were either destroyed by the artist or lost in the bombardments. Kiemeneij's experiments testify to an intuitive sense of formal and color abstraction, and to a discreet desire for synthesis and concision.

In 1926, Kiemeneij decorated the front of an Antwerp store window with abstract and polychrome motifs. It created a fine scandal and proved to be effective publicity.

## GAILLIARD, JEAN-JACQUES

Born in Brussels November 22, 1890. Son of the painter Franz Gailliard. After Greek and Latin classical studies, took courses in solfeggio at the Royal Conservatory in Brussels. 1905-1914 : Student at the Academy of his native city. 1915 : Académie de Saint-Josse-ten-Noode, 1920-1924 : Lived in Paris.

1947 : Retrospective at the Galerie Giroux in Brussels. — 1961 : Retrospective (exhibition in his honor), at the Maison communale de Saint-Gilles (Brussels). — Numerous single-artist exhibits and participation in a large number of group exhibits in Belgium and abroad. — Represented in many museums. — A friend of James Ensor and of Michel De Ghelderode. — Was for many years professor at the Institut des arts et métiers of Saint-Gilles (Brussels).

BIBLIOGRAPHY : Cf. bibliography of Siméon Valentin in the Monographies de l'Art Belge collection (1949). — James Ensor, Introduction to the album « Vie de Sweden-

borg », 12 linoleum-prints by Gailliard. — Michel Seuphor, « Un renouveau de la peinture en Belgique flamande », Ed. Les Tendances nouvelles, Paris, 1932. — Charles Sydney, Catalogue of the exhibition at the Victor Waddington Galleries in Dublin, February 1948. — Michel de Ghelderode, Catalogue of the exhibition at the Galerie Giroux, November 1951. — Gaston-D. Périer, Catalogue of the exhibition Hommage à Jean-Jacques Gailliard (Maison communale de Saint-Gilles, 1957). — Pierre Bourgeois, Colinet, Linze, De la Does, Flouquet, Maurits Bilcke and Marcel Lecomte, Catalogue of the exhibition at the Cheval de Verre, Brussels, 1958. — Maurits Bilcke, Catalogue of the Idées-Taches exhibit, Galerie Giroux, Brussels, May 1959 ; in the same catalogue, Charles Sydney, Coquelet. — Catalogue of the exhibition at the Brunswick Museum, 1959. — Pierre-Louis Flouquet, Catalogue of the exhibition in honor of the artist at the Maison Communale de Saint-Gilles, 1961.

JEAN-JACQUES GAILLIARD, the son of the impressionist Franz Gailliard, defined his painting by calling it *superimpressionism*. Various impressions born of his imagination, or gathered from nature, blend on his canvases in spots, lines and touches which criss-cross and overlap. And so it can be said of him that he has, for a long time, practiced a premature figurative tachisme. It is on the strength of a series of non-figurative canvases, as it happens, which were painted during the years 1920-1930, that this friend of James Ensor and of Michel de Ghelderode deserves to be reckoned among the abstract painters of the first generation. It should be added, however, that, weighed against his figurative works, the abstract works are the exception. But they occupy a special place in the history of contemporary Belgian painting. They were produced, indeed, at a period when all the abstract painters in our country (with the exception of Servranckx in 1927) were painting in a more or less constructivist or neoplastic style. Gailliard, on the contrary, worked in a much freer spirit, leaning to the fantastic. His art even reveals humor, joy, optimism, and at times also a certain sarcasm. He gives for this the following explanation : "I paint in order to escape the demoralizing stamp of civilization. I paint for social health. I paint for fun. God has given me laughter; whoever looks will laugh with me. Amen !" He paints his *Superimpressions* with a quick brush, spontaneously and intuitively : by the direct inspiration of a momentary state of grace. His palette, iridescent and flowery as a Sunday morning, is that of a poet-painter. The practice of abstract painting unquestionably influenced the nature of Gailliard's subsequent figurative work. In connection with the latter, Pierre-Louis Flouquet wrote : "In it you will find the abstract in the concrete and the concrete in the abstract." Gailliard on the one hand paints ideas, and on the other objects which at times undergo extensive metamorphoses on his canvases. But imagination always

leads him to transcend both idea and object. These are projected into a pictorial space where they rise to a magic vision whereby light and color are revealed to us.

Gailliard likewise went in for linoleum printing. In the albums *Vie de Swedenborg*, introduced by James Ensor, and *Vie d'Alcibiade*, our attention is immediately attracted by the original, lively, playful rhythm, as well as by the virtue of planes and lines, which always have a handsome graphic sobriety. "Your point," Ensor wrote, "is a rake, a pair of tongs, a flail; it scratches, it snips, it evens; it flays skins."

Gailliard attaches only a relative importance to his abstract experiments. "Abstraction is the casket ready to receive the jewel. While waiting for this to happen, I dissolved the abstract elements in the planes of a dream. This cured me and saved me from that childhood sickness." (Survey in *De Periscoop*.)

## GUILLAIN, MARTHE

Born in 1891 in Charleroi where she studied painting and drawing.

A long figurative period, mostly in France, from 1919-1935. Many travels abroad (Russia, Turkey, Africa).

From 1955 on has MARTHE GUILLAIN sporadically practiced an instinctive abstraction of a diagrammatic type. In her most recent works she uses a preparation composed of sandy material, a synthetic binder and oil varnish.

## LEONARD, JOS

Born in Antwerp November 28, 1892, died in Ixelles, Brussels, May 13, 1957. Draftsman, inspector-general of technical education. Gave a lecture on modern art at the Vlaamse Kring circle in Mortsel in 1917 : Neo-impressionism, cubism, futurism and orphism.

Participated in the first collective exhibition of the Art Moderne group organized in Antwerp in December 1919. — Six drawings issued in postcard form by « De Driehoek » in 1925. — Participated in the Second Modern Art Congress

at the Salle El Bardo in Antwerp in January 1922. — Specialized in commercial drawings, typography, photographic mounting, stained-glass windows, illustrations, book dummies, luminous signs, etc.

BIBLIOGRAPHY : « Het Vlaamsche Land », February 7, 1917 : report of the lecture at the Vlaamsche Kring about Modern Art: — « De Volksgazet », January 8, 1920, « Le Matin », January 12, 1920, and « Ons Vaderland », January 6, 1920 : reports of the Modern Art group exhibition in Antwerp, December 1919. — August van Cauwelaert, « Het Vlaamsche Land », May 15, 1920. — « Art Libre », November 15, 1919.

JOS LEONARD was one of the first Belgian artists to exhibit abstract works (January 1920). Posted at an early date as to what was going on in the artistic life abroad, he gave a lecture, as early as February 1917, on Delaunay's orphism. He wrote in the *Volksgazet* of January 8, 1920 : "We consider the subject to be something on which to fix a conception of lines and colors, indeed solely to fix a combination of lines or of colors. The value of the subject resides in its possibilities of adaptation. If we find no skeleton that can carry our plastic idea, creative necessity will oblige us to express ourselves by means of pure lines, forms and colors, in other words, without any connection with any subject whatever, and we shall entitle our works *Fantasy*, *Com-*



59.

Jos LEONARD  
Lino, 1924, 8 x 8.  
Private collection.

position, etc." Jos Leonard affirmed in 1954 that the term *abstract* was scarcely used in the twenties. Joseph Peeters spoke of *pure plastics*, while Paul Van Ostaijen



60.

Jean-Jacques GAILLIARD  
Omnibus 1924  
35 x 46, oil on linen  
The artist collection.



in his letters and writings dated from Berlin, recommended *constructivist cubism*. Jos Leonard entitled his most progressive works *Fantasies*, but Paul Van Ostaijen applied to them the epithet *lyrical expressionism*.

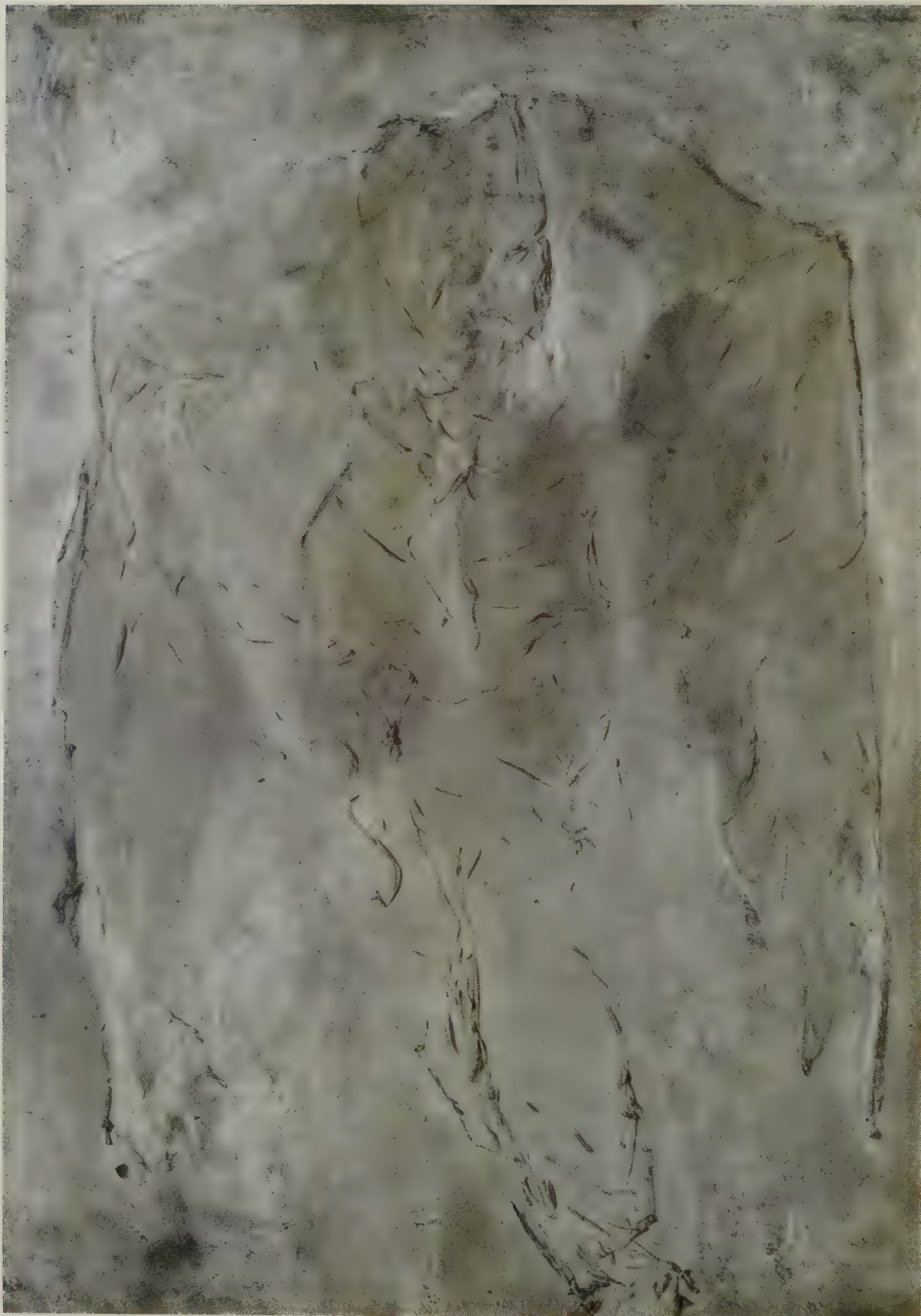
The influence of the lyrical Kandinsky can be felt in Leonard's *Fantasies*, while the black-and-white drawings and the linoleum-prints rather evoke the atmosphere of the tendencies which found concrete expression in the works of the artists belonging to the *De Stijl* group. The major theme of this neo-plasticism is composed of white lines and surfaces which stand out against a black background. Its calm and deliberate equilibrium by no means excludes the fantasy of a very special rhythm. Jos Leonard has never repudiated abstract art. But he soon specialized in various fields in which his talents were not henceforth to find successful outlets: publicity, typography, photo mounting, stained-glass windows, bookbinding and illustration, illuminated signs.

As inspector-general of technical education, he had a positive influence on the adaptation of this government service to the needs of the time.

#### JADOT, MAURICE

Born in 1893 in Brussels. 1910-1914 : Studied architecture at the Academy of Fine Arts of this city. After the war, joined his parents in England, where they had settled. Practiced various occupations before assisting his mother, in London, in the fur trade. Lived thus until 1944 out of touch with the art movement, painting only as an « amateur ».

Made himself known in 1953 among the founders of the London Free Painters group. Has exhibited since 1957 in London, Paris, Brussels, Antwerp, Charleroi, in both one-man and group shows.



61.  
René GUIETTE  
Gray angel, 1956  
115 x 81  
oil on linen.  
Private  
collection.



A neophyte of recent years, in spite of his age, MAURICE JADOT has affinities with the currents of evolution that are opposed to the processes of pure intellectual creation. He is the creator of odd panels, sometimes of various materials mixed with the paint, which he calls *Integrated collages*, at other times cut, hollowed and colored in wood. The reliefs and the hollowed-out ribs as well as the irregular levels of the carvings combine with the heightened effects of color to develop the plastic conception of the *object-picture*.

This technique derives from the figurative painting with heavy texture that he practiced as early as 1930. It is adapted to a very up to date sense of the expressive possibilities of imaginary morphologies as well as of the strangeness of natural structures, eaten away and tortured by the elements, the perception of which is stimulated by examples of art in the raw that surround us. This process quite naturally turned him in the direction of painted wood sculpture, the last phase of his work.

Another artist of Belgian origin who settled in London, Marcelle Van Caillie (born in Brussels in 1922), likewise uses relief as a means of expression.

## GUIETTE, RENE

Born in Antwerp in 1893. Son of the painter Jules Guiette (1852-1901) and elder brother of the poet Robert Guiette. Self-taught as a painter. Given a teaching appointment at the ENSAAD (Ecole Nationale Supérieure d'Architecture et des Arts Décoratifs) in Brussels and then taught at the Institut des Arts et Métiers in Antwerp. Travels in France, England, Spain, Italy, Lebanon.

Principal one-man shows in Paris and Brussels. — Took part, in particular, in the Venice (1954) and São Paulo (1955) Biennials, where he was awarded the Jockey Club Prize, as well as in the international exhibitions of the Carnegie Institute (Pittsburgh, 1955, 1958 and 1961). — Prize of the Japanese Ministry of National Education at the Tokyo Biennial (1961). — Selected the same year for the International Guggenheim Prize. — Is represented in European and American collections. — Has for several years, under the name of Blaise Distel, written articles on the initiation to art for the cultural page of « Le Matin » (Antwerp). — Lives in Antwerp in a house built for him by Le Corbusier in 1926.

BIBLIOGRAPHY : « Robert Guiette », Coll. Monographies de l'Art Belge, Ed. de Sikkel, Antwerp 1950. — Michel Tapié, « Un art autre », Ed. Gabriel Giraud et Fils, Paris 1952. — Philippe d'Arschot, « Art International », vol. III, 1959, pp. 38-42.

RENE GUIETTE underwent an evolution of labyrinthian searching, on the margin of routine tendencies, but held in leash by the force lines of his time. After having found his inspiration, in the immediate post-war, in popular imagery and a certain expressionism enlivened by humor, he revealed himself, after 1930, to be chronologically the first Belgian disciple of Picasso — an influence that will be easily perceptible during at least fifteen years.

In 1947, when the latter went in for the stylistic exercises of emancipated beginners, Guiette took a new direction which resulted in a fundamental transformation in his painting techniques. He now presented comical and virulent paintings whose subjects, still markedly figurative, were carved into the thickness of the color, like primitive scrawls in asphalt or on decrepit walls. Regular and friendly contacts with Dubuffet and Mathieu, a fervent admiration for Fautrier, Wols, Tobey, Bryen, Pollock, Michaux, a curiosity about Zen Buddhism which provided dialectical foundations for his art, led him insidiously to the heart of that *revolution of the non-figured*, to that *lyricism of the non-formal* which Michel Tapié invented and whose impetus appears — before all the comments that it aroused — as a passionate reaction to the claims of premeditated art, and especially of geometric forms.

These many divergent choices illuminate the enigmatic personality and the very special world of René Guiette. While he has made freedom the active attitude of his spirit, the fact nevertheless remains that this freedom is subordinated to phases of assimilation which demonstrate the state of reflection in which his work progresses. One of the most characteristic is assuredly the phase which concentrates on the *materiology* of the painting — an experience which occurs insistently after 1950 and which, in its development, testifies to the infinite variety of relations between the concrete and the abstract.

We have first of all heavy granular, crumbling and scratched coatings, recalling the ruggedness of baked clays, whose hieroglyphic mass evokes the dilapidated animation of old walls and peeling frescoes, things worn and beings in a state of decomposition. We find psychophysical associations which presently develop sharper accents in the form of thick protuberances of incorporated materials : sand, plaster, rags. A singular world comes into being, composed of wrinkles, folds, scratches and tears so delicately introduced that they often confer a kind of halo of poetic ambiguity upon the morbid and the disfigured.

Incidental to this adventure involving materials, products of post-dadaist suggestions and of *art in the raw*, there is manifested Guiette's growing interest in infiguration derived from the principles of Zen Buddhism — a Far Eastern aesthetics or ascesis based on meditation, introspection, fascination with the Great Void. The painter's humor, his fits of malice, his spirit of change and becoming suddenly assume unwonted repercussions, and even an angle of interpretation in this mystical philosophy. "I do not paint, I attend my painting," he once confessed, thereby indicating the power of secret revelation and of inner liberation that he accords to his incantations and to his colored improvisations, sometimes held in exquisite suspension in the fluid modulations of closely related tones, at other times introduced into the refined, violent or velvety opacities of the paint.

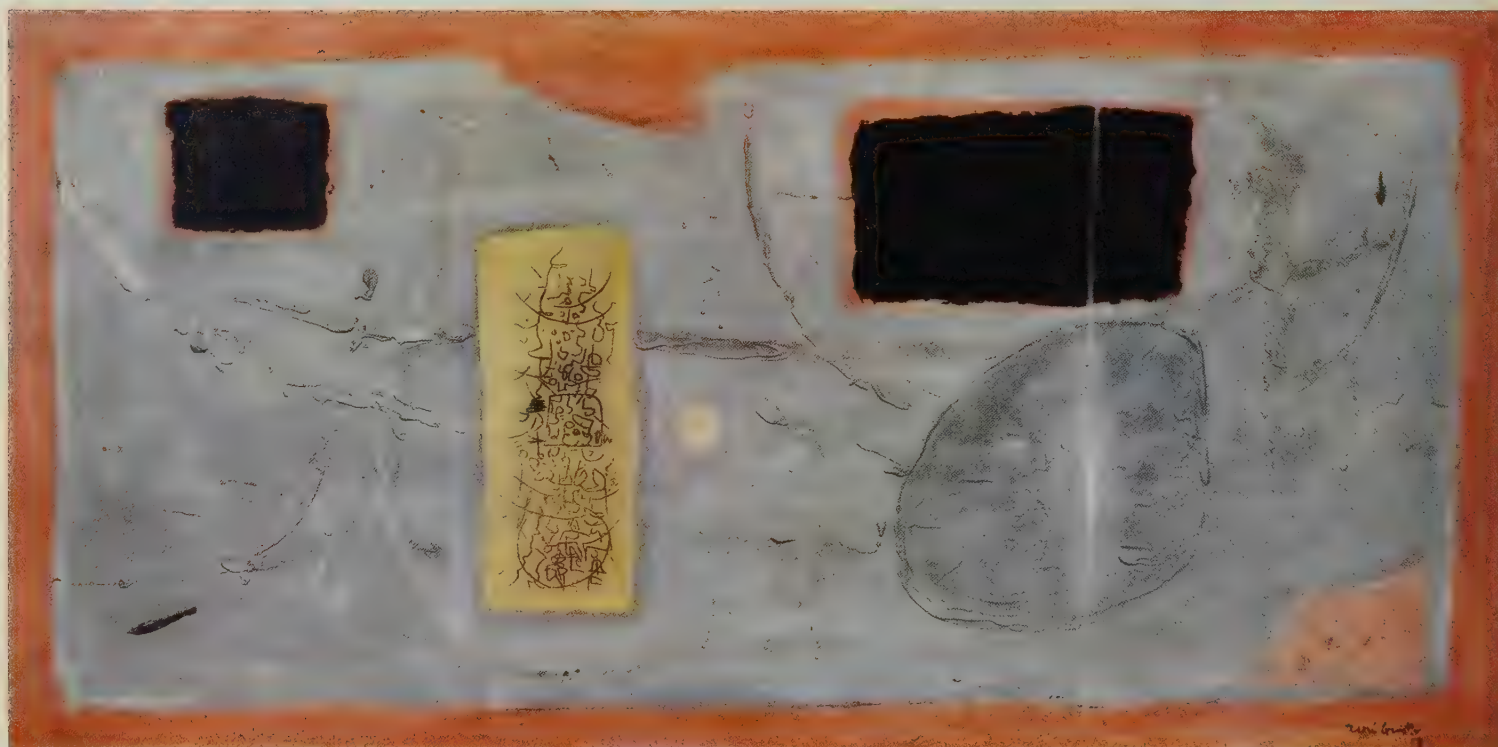
## LACASSE, JOSEPH

Born in Tournai on August 6, 1894. In 1905, became a quarry worker, like his father. Became a stone cutter in 1909 and during this year went to night school and learned to marbleize and to imitate wood. In 1909-1910, unconsciously painted cubist-abstract compositions. 1912 : A student at the Tournai Ecole des Beaux-Arts. Realistic canvases. 1914-1918 : First World War. Taken prisoner, he escaped in 1916 and hid in the Tournai Hospital where he painted figurative works. 1919-1920 : Extends his studies at the Brussels Academy. 1921 : Sojourn in Italy. 1925 : Settled in Paris. Travels in Spain and Holland. Painted quarries and miners.

1931 : Opened the Equipe gallery in Montparnasse, which became a meeting-place for writers, theater people, painters and sculptors. — Met Delaunay and went back to abstract painting in his 1910-1912 style, which he now practiced consciously. — 1939 : Took refuge in England where he became director of a reception center for wounded soldiers. — 1943-1945 : Taught ceramics at Stoke-on-Trent. — 1946 : Returned to Paris. — Painted numerous

62.

René GUIETTE  
Possibilities, 1959  
90 x 180, oil on linen.  
Private collection.





canvases, some based on his pre-war sketches, others in a new vein. — Lacasse exerted a great influence on Poliakoff's development. — One-man shows : Galerie Massol, 1959, Paris ; Drian Gallery, London, 1959 and 1960.

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JOSEPH LACASSE, practically unknown in Belgium before October 1959, had maintained virtually no contact with our artistic circles since he had settled in Paris, in 1925. He was mainly concerned with publicity in favor of other painters, and always neglected to publicize his own. Which probably explains why the real importance of his work was recognized so late, both in Belgium and in France. His work is so much a part of the artist's life that they cannot be separated.

Lacasse was the eldest of the five children of a worker of revolutionary ideas. In 1905, having reached the age of twelve and never having been inside a school, he hired himself out as a laborer in a quarry. Five years later he became a stone-cutter. As a child, he had done figurative drawings, and it was a joy for him, every Sunday, in the year 1906, to learn from Charles Hourdequin, a friend of his father and a theatrical decorator, how to imitate wood and marble. These lessons proved to be of capital importance to him, for they awakened in him the desire to paint, and they taught him to consider the material that offered itself each day before his eyes at his place of work as a plastic theme. He discovered nature at about the same period, and painted boats gliding on the Escaut, ancient buildings, birds perched on rocks. To his great astonishment, Charles Hourdequin saw nothing but colors on the transparent canvases on which Lacasse claimed to have represented his father's garden.

Promoted to the job of quarrier in 1909, Lacasse was so impressed by the structure and the coloration of the quarries, the rocks, and the stratifications of the earth's

crust that he saw here material for pure plastic themes. The rocks that he was extracting all day long changed their tint and tonality from moment to moment. When he returned home, he would try to paint those marvelous colors from memory and transform their material aspect into light.

This was how, in the years 1910 and 1911, the astonishing series of *Pebbles* which was to have a decisive impact on his future work came into being. This series and the canvases of the same period, which dealt with other themes, moved Raymond Cogniat to the following reflection, in *Le Figaro* (July 9, 1959) : "This is a curious case, of an artist several times discovered and then forgotten for years, one of the precursors of abstract art, one of the most gifted and the most appealing because of his character as a man and the brilliance of his painting. What ill-luck pursues him, to keep him in the shadow when he should be out in the lead ? When he began experimenting, it might have been said that it was too soon; is it going to be said now that it is too late, and are we going to be told that he is just a follower ?"

It is remarkable that the *Pebbles* mentioned above are drawn in pastel on the black paper used at that time in the quarries. Might they not be a reflection of the sombre conditions in which the workers of the period, ever menaced by cave-ins, carried on their dangerous work ? And could it not be that Lacasse was already protesting, in his own way, against the enslavement of the proletarian masses ? In any case, as his experience as a painter grew richer, the preoccupations of the artist took precedence of those of the militant.

From now on it was no longer only whole rocks that Lacasse was to represent, but also fragments. The block burst and the splinters became ever more integrated into a colored background. The artist was fascinated as much by the coloration as by the form. With admirable felicity he rendered the colors of the surfaces that had remained intact as well as the inner shades revealed by splintering.

Forms and colors are here so diverse that the series of pastels, considered as a whole, offers an amazing variety. While it is difficult, to be sure, to determine in what measure the young Lacasse already knowingly saw himself in the role of a painter, it is nevertheless obvious that his intuition drove him to a degree of abstraction such that the *Pebbles* — and the other works of those years — appear to the viewer today as unmistakably non-figurative compositions. Even though the artist is quite ready to admit that such was not his





63.  
Joseph LACASSE  
Study No. 1, 1911, 65 x 50, pastel.  
Private collection.





64.  
Joseph LACASSE  
The passage of the Germans,  
Tournai 1914, 210 x 110, oil on linen.  
Van Leuven collection, Koningshooikt.

intention, the abstract character of his youthful works is undeniable. In 1910, the year when he wrote *Über das Geistige in der Kunst*, which was published by Piper in 1912, Kandinsky was 44. At that time Lacasse, who was 16, still knew nothing about how to prepare a canvas. Totally illiterate, the young worker's son let himself be guided by his sole intuition — like Hartung at about the same age — to a point of evolution of modern art which Kandinsky had reached by the path of reasoning.

The spirit of the period pointed to the road of abstraction, and the climate of the time was shortly to inspire a non-figurative art. To this still diffused current Lacasse, hardly yet an adolescent but possessed by the demon of painting, was not unresponsive.

When Michel Seuphor, in 1960, saw a few of Lacasse's youthful works in my house, he was struck by their resemblance to certain canvases of Poliakoff's and other great abstract painters of today. See, for example, the *Composition* of 1937 reproduced here.

In 1912, Lacasse enrolled in the School of Fine Arts in Tournai. There he came into contact with figurative art, and it is easy to imagine what his reactions were. But he was afforded the opportunity of making rapid technical progress. His studies, unfortunately, were interrupted by the war. He was made a prisoner, managed to escape, and went into hiding. The atrocities, the murders, the bombardments, the ruins, the sight of the wounded and the refugees awakened in him an unsuspected energy. He denounced war and his protests soon developed the violence of a cry of vengeance. His canvases shouted his hatred of the soldiery, lamented the sufferings of a vanquished people. He communicated his sentiments in a style that was both cubist and expressionist, without his having ever heard of either expressionism or cubism. Before our eyes fantastic visions rise up in which white and black predominate along with earthy tints, on which a spot, violent and painful as a wound, sometimes stands out. The canvas entitled *August 10* and dated 1914 is a particularly impressive example. Painted twenty years before Picasso's, it can be considered as the *Guernica* of the first world war.

In 1919 Lacasse resumed his studies at the Academy of Brussels. We shall find him again in 1925 in Paris, where he was to settle for good.

Working in a studio across the way from Brancusi's, he painted scenes from the life of quarrymen and miners, as well as religious scenes. Christ he represented as a man of the people, that is, as a worker. At

this time, Lacasse became converted to Catholicism. He met Maurice Denis. He painted frescoes on the Juvisy church, but the ecclesiastical authorities, considering that the Biblical scenes as the former anarchist had represented them were too bold, had them covered with a coating of cement. Lacasse brought the matter to court, but lost the case. He attended meetings organized by Jacques Maritain, read Claudel, Péguy, Rimbaud and Bernanos, and studied the problems of light in the works of Newton. In 1931 he opened the gallery *L'Equipe*, and founded a review by the same name. *L'Equipe* became an artistic and intellectual rallying center. Lectures, debates, theatrical performances were held. There Michel de Ghelderode's *Magie Rouge* was given its first Paris performance, and the canvases of Picasso, Delaunay, Gleizes, Picabia, Beaudin, Löwenstein, Vantongerloo, as well as those of the German expressionists, were shown. With Jean Vilar and Poullaille, *L'Equipe* became a true intellectual center to which Jean-Marie Serreau and André Frère gave their collaboration, and where people came to hear Mauriac. Lacasse distributed tracts, had set-tos with the police, expended himself tirelessly to serve the cause of art, and at the same time the cause of artists.

When he met Delaunay in 1927, he found in this artist's canvases what he had been looking for for many years. And this encounter was to mark his return to abstract art. While he still kept the canvases hung on the walls of the little room of *L'Equipe*, he began in 1931 to compose abstract works in the style of the *Pebbles* of the years 1910-1911, but with greater simplicity and a greater richness of palette. Poliakoff, who at the time practiced a wholly conventional figurative painting, often visited Lacasse and was to remember fifteen years later works which Lacasse had sometimes executed before his very eyes. That Poliakoff must have remembered the themes of the broken stones developed by Lacasse appears to us altogether certain. In the numerous *Albums* that the founder of *L'Equipe* still has in his possession, we find small compositions which astonishingly prefigure tachism and abstract expressionism.

During this period Lacasse expressed himself as much by his pen as he did by his brush. His notebooks reveal a lively mind and a temperament inclined to opposition and revolt. Their publication would certainly create scandal in some quarters and delight the mind in others.

Drafted in 1939, Lacasse was sent on a mission to England, where he was put in charge of a rehabilitation





65.  
Joseph LACASSE  
Marcinelle, 1956  
205 x 265, oil on linen.  
Private collection.



66.  
Joseph LACASSE  
First day of the Creation, 1949  
260 x 186, oil on linen.  
Private collection.





67.

Joseph LACASSE  
Blue contre-dominant 1, 1959  
130 x 97, oil on linen.  
Private collection.



68.  
Joseph LACASSE  
Composition, 1940  
16 x 22, oil on linen.  
Private collection.

center for wounded soldiers. There he mainly taught the technique of pottery.

On his return to Paris in 1946, he experienced serious difficulties. They did not shake his courage, and he went back to painting, finding his inspiration in sketches and drawings he had done before the war. He eschewed artistic circles — both the official and the informal ones. Leaving others to push themselves in the scramble for meretricious success, he wrote, he painted — at times large-format canvases — and encouraged and helped young artists.

For Lacasse fulfills a mission which is as much intellectual as artistic. He wrote us in 1959: "In wholly renouncing earthly inspiration, I was one of the first to realize the infinitely more difficult, but also more

satisfactory task, of seeking a new kind of beauty in painting by the sole means of the soul and by an intuition of a cosmic order. Forgetting the past, I discovered the combination of forms and spaces liberated of all intellectual meaning. I progressed toward pure forms with the aim of evoking a spiritual joy and of lifting the knowledge of the beautiful beyond the frontiers of Belgium, my country. True art remains calm, simple, and alone. So it is with the masters of the beginning of the twentieth century. A lover of silence, I have waited for God's breath for forty years, to such a point that I was ashamed to be taken for an artist.

"Fortunately, real art-lovers nowadays, gifted with artistic clairvoyance, do not pay much attention to whether or not an unknown masterpiece has received public





69.  
Joseph LACASSE  
Red dominant red, 1961  
130 x 160, oil on linen.  
Private collection.

recognition. When the painting is born, I wait for it to speak, to act. It has its own life, it is mysterious and sacred like everything that lives. It exists with its secret, its own autonomy. It exerts a magic, it prescribes respect for a concrete order of existence. I expect it to enter life, the city, an architecture among concrete people and things to bring to them the trembling light that I have invoked, that has invoked me, that invokes us. This is why painting is not the representation of the already seen, but a blow of the pick in the invisible." We might quote more extensive extracts from the passionate correspondence of Lacasse, who always writes

what he thinks and thinks what he says. Success has in no way changed him, he has kept the simplicity of the quarriers of the Tournaisis. He continues to work modestly and courageously, executing an ever greater number of canvases in spiritual joy. His social conscience remains lively, as his great composition entitled *Marcinelle* brilliantly proves. The depths of the earth are ablaze; the miners succumb beneath the masses of ore and in the flames. Because of the power of its rhythm and its coloration, this canvas — so different from the *First Day of Creation*, which is striking because of the serenity of its construction and the sobriety of its color-

ation — is one of the most outstanding of Lacasse's works

His work is immense and varied. We find in it nearly all the tendencies of modern art, very often exemplified before they were the vogue. Although Lacasse has acquired a solid technical mastery, his canvases have always preserved the originality of the talent that tried to express itself on the threshold of his adolescence. Whether his work is figurative, decorative, or abstract, it always has an intellectual and plastic richness which gives to some of his creations a broadly human dimension, to others a perfect pictorial purity. Lacasse takes little stock in formulae and systems. The paint quality is never treated for its own sake : it is constantly subordinated to the objective which is the human expression, the sacred revelation, the cosmic dimension of instinct. As Lacasse sees it, art is imagination, the creative act, intuition. His work is meant to give form to the universal rhythm, to the great vital mystery, to the stirring manifestations of human energy. And even more, to the inner revelation that goes beyond all culture. An authentic creator, Lacasse is always in quest of new victories, seeking to communicate an ever more intense light. A light which is both form and color. It must radiate around ideal and immutable forms in order to be the reflection of eternal beauty, which is God.

Roger Bordier wrote in 1954 : "We must now get to know Lacasse." It was shortly after this that success came to consecrate the work — and the altogether uncommon adventure — of this *Tournaisien* of genius. Renown does not greatly impress Lacasse, who pursues the task he has chosen for himself without paying much attention to the stir being made today over his name.

## PEETERS, JOZEF

Born, July 24, 1895, in Antwerp. At the age of nine, attended night-school courses at the Academy. 1913 : A schoolmate gave him the catalogue of an exhibition of Italian futurists (1912, Sackville Gallery, London). 1914 : Portraits inspired by a theosophical impulse. 1918 : Founded the Moderne Kunst group, September 14. Marinetti sent him documentation on futurism. Painted futurist canvases. 1919 : Lyrical fantasies unrelated to nature. 1920 : Met Karel Maes. Organized the first Modern Art Congress in Antwerp. First abstract work : « Soldatentoestand ». 1921 : De Sikkel published a first series of 6 linoleum-prints. Trip to Paris where he met Gleizes, Mondrian, Marthe Donas, Archipenko, Vantongerloo, Bruce, « the only one who taught him something ». Dynamism of static machinery. Began to contribute to the review « Het Overzicht ». 1922 : Second

series of linoleum-prints, published by the author Second and third Modern Art Congresses

Exhibit in collaboration with Herwarth Walden's Der Sturm. — Met Servranckx. — Seuphor invited him to join the editorial committee of the « Overzicht » as of the 13th issue of the review (November 1922). — Etching by Peeters on the fly-leaf. — Christmas vacation 1922-1923 : Trip with Seuphor to Berlin. — Met Marinetti, Adolf Behne, Moholy-Nagy, Lissitzky, Walden, Blumner, Schreyer, Kandinsky. — 1924 Settled in an apartment in the city He furnished and decorated it in accordance with the « De Stijl » ideas. — February 1925 Last issue of « Het Overzicht », with a Peeters engraving on the fly-leaf. — April 1925-February 1926 Published with Duco Perkens (Du Perron) 10 issues of « De Driehoek » review — The 7th issue (October 1925), carried Peeters' manifesto, « Driehoek-Manifest voor Schilderkunst, to animate a surface by means of geometric planes ». — 1925-1926 Published 7 « Driehoek-Cahiers » (Paul Van Ostaijen, Duco Perkens, C-A. Willinck, Gaston Burssens, Raoul Houwink). Publication of 5 series of postcard reproductions of the works of Servranckx, Jos Léonard, Karel Maes, Jozef Peeters and Maurice Gaspard (furniture). — 1927 Lived in complete retirement. Nursed his sick wife. Gave up painting. — 1954 : Renewed contact with the art world after the exhibition Premiers Abstraits belges in which he participated and which was organized by Delahaut, Toussaint and Bilcke at the Galerie Saint-Laurent in Brussels from September 11 to 24. Catalogue prefaced by Maurits Bilcke. — 1956 Took up painting again, first with figurative works. — 1957 : Again produced abstract works. — 1958 : Exhibited with van Hoeydonck and Ausloos at the Château Middelheim in Antwerp. — 1959 Exhibited with Carl Rabus in the C.A.W. Room in Antwerp. — Took an active part in the organization of the Premiers Abstraits belges exhibit initiated by Delahaut and Bilcke at the Hessenhuis in Antwerp from October 10 to November 8. — September 10, 1960 Died in Antwerp. — 1960 : Jozef Peeters retrospective show at the Hessenhuis in Antwerp ; Speeches by Marc Callewaert and Pierre Bourgeois.

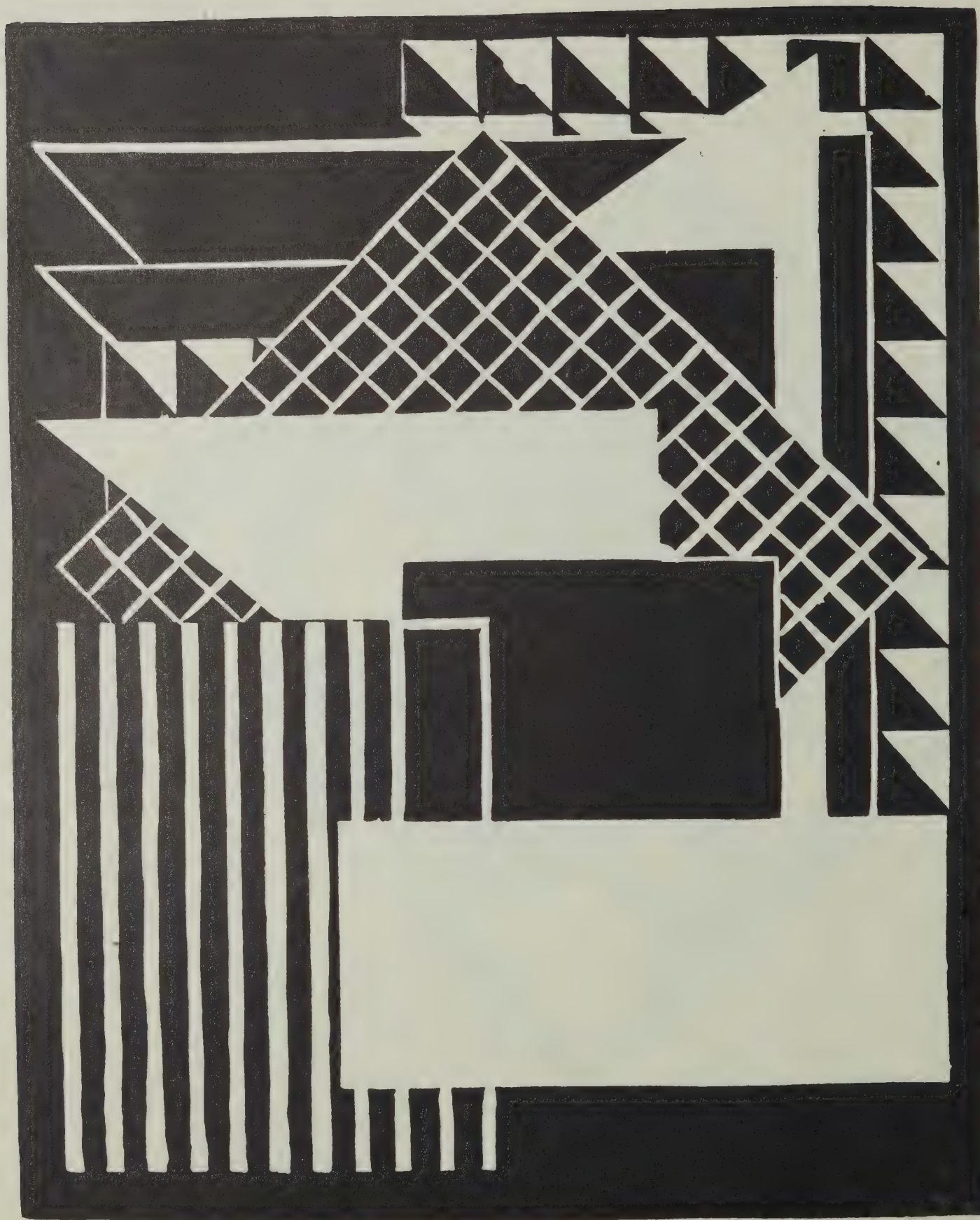
BIBLIOGRAPHY : Catalogue of the Retrospective Exhibit 1960. — Maurits Bilcke, « De Vlaamse Gids », No. 4, 1961. Preface to the album XVII Linogravures, Ed. Mesure, Paris, 1962. A showing of this album at the Galerie Mesure in Paris and at the Galerie La Madeleine in Brussels, presentation by Michel Seuphor and Maurits Bilcke. — Marc Callewaert, « De Gazet van Antwerpen », November 25, 1960 ; « De Periscoop », October 1960. — Mon Steyaert, « De Periscoop », November 1, 1959

JOZEF PEETERS, when he was still only a child, would read human faces and landscapes into the patterns of imitation marble. Later he freely accentuated them. In 1913 — a fact which had an important impact on his future — a friend, a student like himself at the Antwerp Academy, showed him the catalogue of the Exhibition of Works by the Italian futurist painters organized in the Sackville Gallery Ltd. in Piccadilly. For the first time the amazed student made contact with an art different from the French. The following year he lived with Edmond Van Dooren and Daan de Meulemeester at Burcht on the Scheldt, where the painting of landscapes in nature became for all of them the favorite occupation. When the war broke out Peeters remained in Antwerp and painted portraits, which were influenced to a certain extent by theosophy and among which already



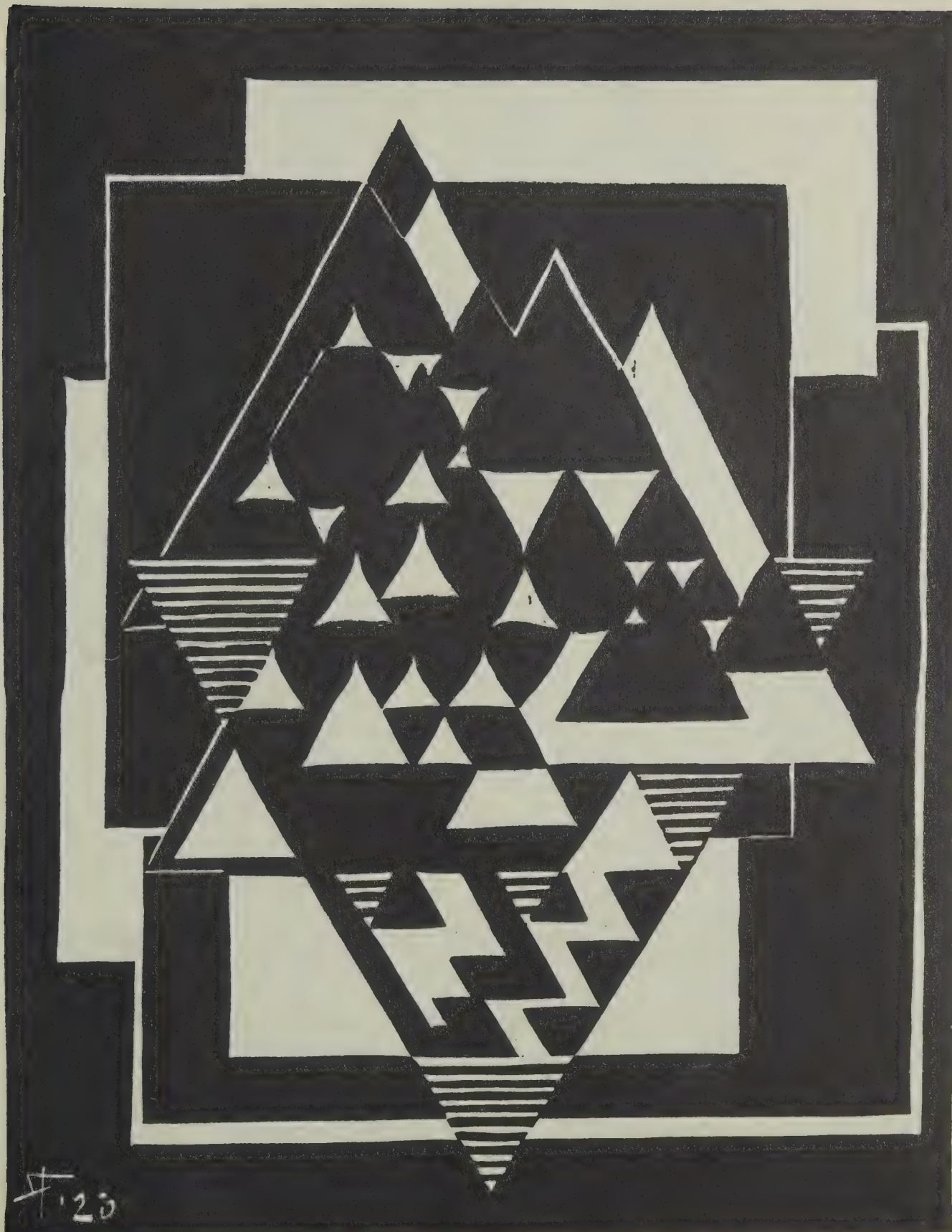


70.  
Jozef PEETERS  
Lino I, 1922, 34 x 34 (lozenge)  
Private collection.



71.  
Jozef PEETERS  
Lino I, 1924  
27 1/2 x 22.  
Private collection.





72.  
Jozef PEETERS  
Lino I, 1923  
36 x 28  
Private collection.

appeared a *Head with fixed lines*. In 1915 he painted his first composed canvas, *Circumstances of creation*. It is an extended hand, palm down. The magic-symbolic relation of the basic rectangle and the triangles is not pursued here so much in order to obtain a plastic expression as to give rise to a *meditation* resulting from the contemplation of the image.

Later the artist composed other similar small works up to the moment when he noticed that the relations of these basic geometric planes likewise created a certain nervous tension, to such a point that aesthetic objectives could likewise be joined to them.

On september 14, 1918, Peeters together with a few friends founded the Art Moderne circle. During this period he received a number of futurist submissions from Marinetti which unquestionably influenced him. We notice in his *Small Peacocks* dated 1918 the successive phases of movement caught in discontinuous forms. We may mention also *La Rue Léopold* (September 1918) and *L'Eglise Saint-Paul* (October 1918) as belonging to this same period. Mechanized dynamics makes its appearance already in *La Rue Nationale* (May 28, 1918). According to the painter, this work contains accents which convey the influence of sound on sight.

In 1919 the dynamic Peeters brought out a series of watercolors, *Lyrical Fantasies*, which did not have their point of departure in nature. And we believe it was in these that he first tried his hand at abstraction. Meanwhile he had subscribed to the reviews *De Stijl* and *Der Sturm*, he had read the writings of Kandinsky, whose theories he applied from then on.

The Art Moderne group, of which Peeters was the promoter, decided to organize Modern Art Congresses. The first was held in 1920 in conjunction with an exhibition of the works of the participants. Peeters exhibited his first abstract canvas, *Soldatentoestand*, here, composed in 1920 shortly after he had been liberated. This canvas has unfortunately been lost. *De Sikkle* in 1921 published his first album of six linoleum-prints which were in part influenced by neo-plasticism, and which are an amazing anticipation of the works of artists like Vasarely, van Doesburg and Vantongerloo, and partly also those of Kandinsky. During the summer holidays we find Peeters in Paris, where he invited the cubists to attend the Second Congress of Modern Art. He was presented by Fernand Léger as a member of the Independent Artists group, and he also met Mondrian. There he underwent several influences which he was later to express. With Gleizes he established relations which were to remain constant. Marthe Donas introduced him

to Archipenko, who wanted him to join the Section d'Or. Peeters refused, as he by no means saw eye to eye with the cubists. He could not share the conceptions of artists who take an objective subject as a starting point, usually a still life, transform it as they please, but abandon it after all in favor of a stylized form.

Patrick Henry Bruce, who had exhibited some abstract works in Paris at the Salon des Indépendants as early as 1914, was the only one who exerted a certain influence on him. Bruce taught him in particular that a line does not exist as such, but that it is only the side of a surface. He also taught him that the weakening and vanishing forces of colors must be respected. The *Round Canvas* dated October 1921 and others (until in 1923) are the outcome of these considerations. The dynamism of the futurist movement here gives way to the dynamism of the static machine, of technical stress. A wonderful example is the great canvas of 1921 entitled *Composition*.

At this period Peeters executed several compositions on glass, most of which have not survived the gnawing tooth of time, and published several linoleum-prints in *Het Overzicht* and other reviews.

Although Peeters knew the Parisian abstractionnists, he seemed not to know too much about what his own compatriots had produced in this tendency. In the December 1921 number of *Het Overzicht*, he bestows the title of *plastici* solely on Karel Maes and himself. And he writes: "Meanwhile our work will perhaps have been fruitful to other 'plastici' whom I beg to forgive me if I do not name them, since they are unknown to me." Strange, too, is the fact that he, an abstract painter, should be opposed to "any consideration concerning abstract art." Shortly afterwards — in January 1922 — he organized the Second Modern Art Congress. There he met Servranckx, renewed contact with Michel Seuphor who invited him to join the editorial staff of *Het Overzicht* where linoleum-prints by Peeters, Karel Maes, and Edmond Van Dooren had already appeared. Peeters immediately accepted and was instrumental in getting the review to devote more attention and space to the plastic arts. "My international relations and my responsibility for the section devoted to the plastic arts," he wrote, "again made it a highly appreciated review." With Seuphor he met in Berlin renowned artists like Marinetti, Vassari, Moholy-Nagy, Kandinsky, Lissitzky, Herwarth and Nell Walden.

In 1924 he moved to the Quai De Gerlache, where he lived until his death. Here he enjoyed a magnificent view over the Scheldt, the warehouses, the boats and



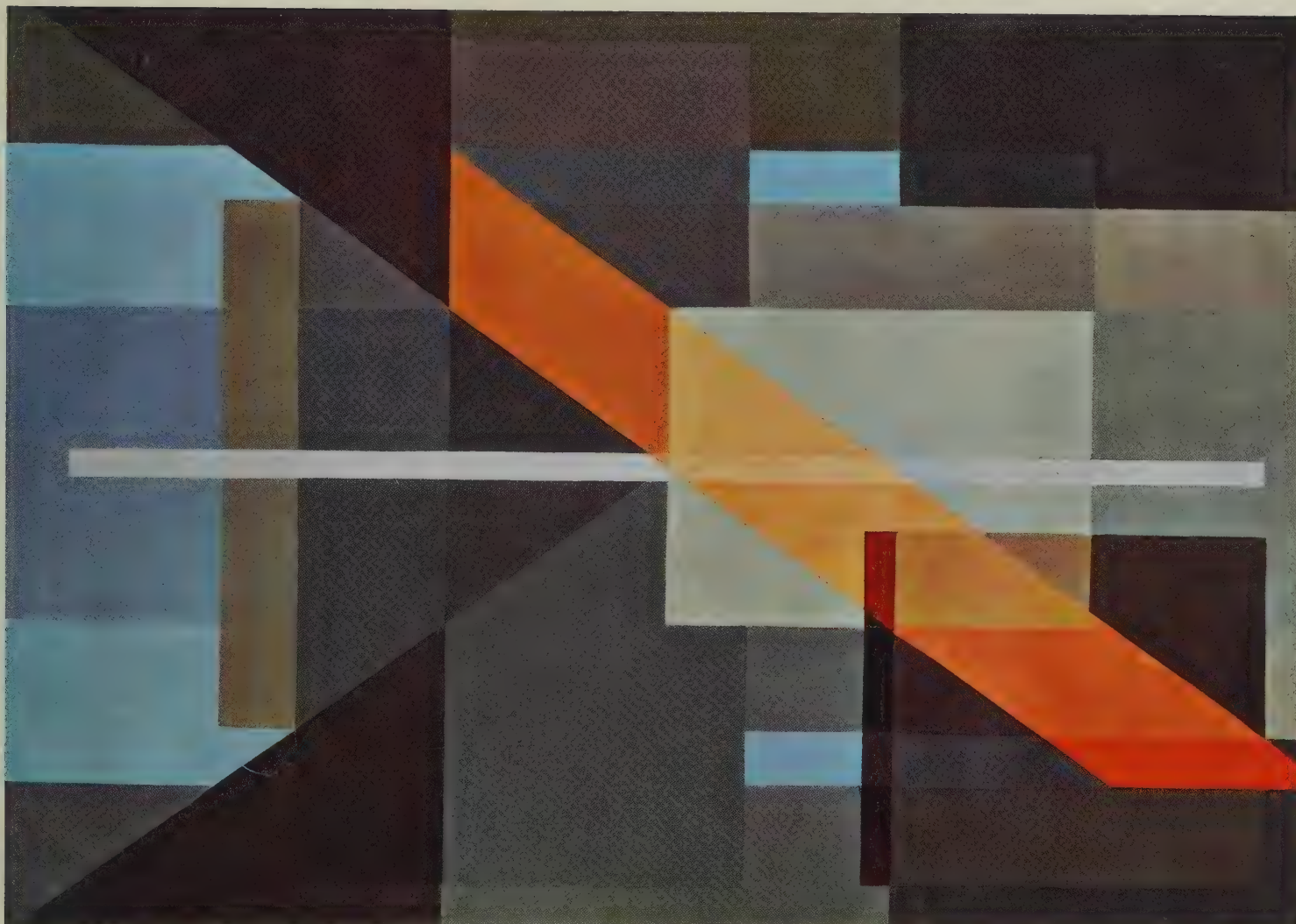


73.  
Jozef PEETERS  
Composition on mirror, 1921  
77 x 62, body-colour on glass.  
Private collection.



74.  
Jozef PEETERS  
Composition, 1923  
70 x 50, oil on linen.  
M.S. collection, Paris.





75.  
Jozef PEETERS  
Composition, 1959  
100 x 140, oil on linen.  
Private collection.

the quays, which themes he transposed into abstract compositions on his canvases. The apartment is worth visiting because of the neo-plastic painting which decorates the walls and the ceilings, and also because of the rational furnishing. Peeters was an advocate of the integration of painting for interior decoration and of functional objects.

The last number of *Het Overzicht* appeared in February 1925. Seuphor meanwhile had definitely emigrated to Paris. With Duco Perkens (Du Perron), Peeters, from

April 1925 to February 1926, published the ten numbers of the review *De Driehoek*. His message in the first number is relatively evasive: the new art is constructive as to form and is addressed to the community. Not a word about *abstract art*. The second, and last, text by Peeters (except for the review) appeared in October 1925 in number 7 of *De Driehoek*, under the title *Manifesto for Painting*. This was his main theoretical statement. Here is a succinct summary of it: "The essential law is: to animate a plane without any other aim than



76.  
Jozef PEETERS  
Composition, 1960  
130 x 175, oil on linen.  
Private collection.

this animation itself. Today animation can only be achieved by means of geometrical planes. Every imitated form — or even a work which takes a line as a means of expression — indicates aims which are outside of the pure animation of the plane. A line is the limit between two planes. The color of a plane gives rise to a distance with respect to the color of another plane. The plane serves solely as a plastic motif. Perspective does not exist for the plane, because there are only two dimensions."

If one reads the text in extenso one will notice that the word plane appears at least twenty times in this relatively brief manifesto, which seems to confirm the fact that Peeters attaches an enormous importance to it. Moreover, it is to be observed that Peeters wishes to give a name neither to his art nor to his theories. He will not create any new *-ism*. Odd is the fact that this manifesto does not mention *abstract art* either. Several times the painter indicates the initial figurative theme which was at the basis of his purely abstract



compositions, which does not correspond to his previously published statements. The essential difference between the non-figurative and abstract art therefore did not seem to interest him. Independently of all theory, in his work he practiced both tendencies.

The publication by the review *De Driehoek* of seven *Driehoek-Cahiers* and five series of reproductions (see bibliography) was the dazzling apotheosis which put the final period to the avant-garde activity of the first Antwerp group of abstractionists.



77.  
Jozef PEETERS  
Composition, 1960  
102 x 110, oil on linen.  
Private collection.

Three years later, in 1928, the review *Sept Arts*, which was the platform of the Brussels precursors, quite as combative as those of Antwerp, disappeared in its turn. Flemish figurative expressionism triumphed. Among the abstractionists the discouragement seemed to have become generalized. Peeters, like all the others — Servranckx alone excepted — withdrew from artistic life. From 1935 on, he took care of a sick wife and raised children. The palette and the brush were abandoned. He entered into a total solitude.

It was only in 1954, at the first retrospective devoted to the first Belgian abstracts, that works by Peeters were again shown. This new and unhoped-for contact proved to be an encouragement to the painter and made him decide, in 1955, after his wife's death, to take up painting again. After thirty years of absence this was not easy. He first turned out some figurative works, but already in 1957 he began to apply his old principles. He took up again the themes of lost canvases, worked over old sketches, drawings, and projects, as a result of which certain compositions bear two dates (for example, 1925-1958). Finally, he reached the point of painting original and new abstract canvases. On April 22, 1957, he wrote us: "I have succeeded in creating an absolute composition, called abstract." Two years later, he announced: "I really want to begin to work."

And Jozef Peeters really worked a great deal the last years of his life! Having felt the real value of the hours, he wanted to catch up with the many years lost for his art. But death overtook him unexpectedly. In November 1960 the young Antwerp painters devoted to the honorary member of the G 58 group a fine retrospective which Peeters himself had actively helped to prepare and for which he had great hopes. Alas, he did not live to see it at the Hessenhuis.

In our modern art the significance of Peeters appears to us to be a double one. On the one hand, he was the enthusiastic moving spirit, almost the dictator, of the Antwerp *avant-garde*, and on the other a determined painter, animated by a pioneer spirit. One cannot ignore his numerous linoleum-prints, a judicious choice of which appeared in album form at Ed. Mesure in Paris in 1961, any more than one can fail to mention his many posters, cartoons for tapestries, drawn textst, decorated vases, furnishing plans, graphic works, etc. His geometric studies, which are too little known, deserve to be studied separately.

But Peeters, like most of his abstract contemporaries, was born too soon for the Flanders of the twenties.

Still under-developed culturally, it had eyes only for the romantic and folkloric figurative expressionism, which we by no means wish to under-estimate, but which was the only art expression at the time to be efficiently publicized. The fact of having interrupted his work for thirty years was not favorable for Peeters's work. But time today heals many things. And even if certain texts and statements by the editor of the *Drie-hoek* do not correspond to his work, we can nevertheless claim that in the evolution of modern art in our country his work was at the very head of the *avant-garde*. His last canvas, *Composition*, dated August 1960 and inspired by Richard Strauss's *Till Eulenspiegel*, remained unfinished. It nevertheless triumphantly closes a suddenly interrupted career. Late though it is, it may be considered today as one of the most remarkable performances by the precursors of Antwerp.

## BURSENS, GASTON

Born in Termonde, February 18, 1896. Known especially as a poet, he has also made his mark as a painter.

His first exhibition at the Palais des Beaux-Arts of Brussels, in 1958. — Subsequent exhibitions in Antwerp, Malines, Termonde, the Hague and Amsterdam. — Among his literary works: studies on Floris Jaspers and Gust De Smet.

After a surrealist period in the style of René Magritte, GASTON BURSENS turned, in about 1957, to non-figurative painting, executing works in which the distribution and harmony of the volumes are not always fortunate, but in which the graphic element is particularly ingenious. The coloration, which extends over the whole range of colors, is limited by preference to the subdued tones.

In the case of this painter, the voice of the poet unquestionably dominates that of the painter. Yet he succeeds in transferring to his canvases something of the freshness and the youthfulness of his verses.

## KERELS, HENRI

Born in Brussels in 1896, died there in 1956. Painter, engraver and occasional writer. Attended the Academy of Fine Arts of Brussels (1915), then the free academy « L'Effort ». Travels to the Belgian Congo (1929 and 1939), Germany, Italy, Great Britain and the Netherlands.

Exhibited regularly in Belgium from 1923. — An art critic for the daily « La Lanterne » from 1946. Author of a « Manuel de Gravure originale » (Brussels, 1950).



BIBLIOGRAPHY : « D'un nouvel espace », an album of twelve drawings preceded by a text by Marcel Lecomte, Ed. Ex-Libris, Brussels 1956.

A truly surprising case ! After having vegetated in the course of a long career in the complacent acceptance of the most humdrum vision and after having belittled in the press the emancipation of the young school from conformist traditions, HENRI KERELS suddenly renounced his past and in rapid stages reached a realm related to non-formal abstraction, and even *tachisme*, which was practically unknown in Belgium. This radical change, the first indices of which are to be found in 1950 in a series of monotypes, entered into its decisive phase three years later. From then on his paintings showed a kind of instantaneous bursting of spots and multi-colored tracings whose flocculations, squirts and sprawls seem governed by the idea of gyration, of tumult and disintegration. Pollock's turbulent world, in short, is here reflected like tall reefs in a pocket mirror.

#### VAN DOOREN, EDMOND

Born in Antwerp October 16, 1896. Student at the Berchem Academy in 1908 and the Antwerp Academy in 1911. Rented a studio with Jozef Peeters in 1912. In 1914, together with Jozef Peeters and Daan de Meulemeester, settled in Burcht-on-the-Scheldt. In 1918 he founded the Moderne Kunst circle with J. Peeters.

In 1918 exhibited with the Doe Stil Voort group in Brussels. — 1919 : Influenced by the German expressionists and by Delaunay ; participated in the Moderne Kunst exhibition in Antwerp. — 1920 : Influenced by De Stijl. — 1921 : Publication of a series of linoleum-prints by « Het Overzicht », with introduction by Victor J. Brunclair. — 1922 : Participated in the second congress of Modern Art in Antwerp.

BIBLIOGRAPHY : Willem Van den Aker, « Edmond Van Dooren, Kunstschilder », Ed. Regenboog, Borgerhout 1930. — A.J.J. Delen, « Les Artistes du groupe Art Moderne », Antwerp 1935. — M.-E. Traibaut, « Edmond Van Dooren », Kunstkring 't Getij, Antwerp, about 1953. — Michel Seuphor, « Un renouveau de la peinture en Belgique flamande », Ed. Les Tendances Nouvelles, Paris 1932.

EDMOND VAN DOOREN founded the Moderne Kunst circle September 14, 1918, with a few artists, among whom were Jos Leonard, P. Smekens, Huib Hoste and Jozef Peeters, a friend of long standing. In 1919, he came under the influence of the German expressionists and of Delaunay. The following year, having come to know *De Stijl*, he felt drawn by the neo-plasticism that van Doesburg had just shown in Antwerp and in Brussels.

This contact led to the publication, in 1921, by *Het Overzicht*, of an album of eight linoleum prints. Victor J. Brunclair wrote, in the introduction to this work : "The present album provides a summary of the evolution of the black-and-white composition : initially baroque in inspiration, it passes through the deformation of the image in order to reach constructivist representation." W. van den Aker later aptly wrote that "the deformation is not here an alteration but an abstraction of form." This remark certainly applies to prints 1 and 2, entitled *The City* and *The Rain*, which are still, in a sense, figurative. The six other works on the other hand are completely abstract. The artist, for that matter, named them *Fantasia* (a title which we also find Peeters and Leonard using), *Improvisations*, and *Invention*.

But in 1922 Van Dooren turned away from abstract art. "It was the reaction," Willem van den Aker observed, "of an artist who was rediscovering that the art of painting is a way of furnishing a space and not of covering a surface." This second conception, which seemed for the moment to have led the painter to a dead end, was nevertheless to reappear in subsequent works, in particular in canvases characterized by a more or less futurist cubism.

Although we are convinced that these, as well as the abstract linoleum prints, belong to the best of Van Dooren's work, the artist nevertheless abandoned abstract art, as Maurice Schelck was to do much later. This is how he explained his about-face, in the October 1954 number of *De Periscope* : "The meaning of a work is to be found beyond abstraction : in the metaphysical realm. Which means that the idea bears the form in itself." However this may be, Van Dooren's linoleum-prints remain very close to the spirit of many geometric works of today. They have lost none of their virtue.

#### DE VLAMYNCK, GEO

Born in Bruges in 1897. Attended the Academy of Fine Arts in Brussels (where he became a teacher in 1939), then the Ecole Nationale Supérieure d'Architecture et des Arts Décoratifs (E.N.S.A.A.D.). Travels to Italy (1922) and Czechoslovakia (1927). Taught a course in drawing at the Athénée de St-Gilles, where Nicolas de Staël was his pupil. — Devotes himself especially to monumental and decorative arts (frescoes), stained-glass windows, ceramics, graphic techniques.

First one-man show in Brussels in 1925. — Has intermittently taken part in group exhibitions in Belgium and other countries.

GEO DE VLAMYNCK came late (1959) to a realization of the significance of the abstract, at the end of a slow gestation which proceeds from a constant preoccupation with stylization. This inclination is based on a synthesis of figurative data, increasingly concentrated in their essential force lines. The will to austerity, to bareness which we find in his present works finds expression in the relating of space to the architectural rhythms which has for a long time been a tendency in his art. The simplification of forms, their broad, firm framework, the considerable economy of the colors organically incorporated in the deliberate denaturalization of the initial motif favor a consciously plastic interpretation far removed from any sentimental or imaginative intentions.

## MOREL, PHILIPPE

Born in 1897 into a family of the Ghent aristocracy, the Morel de Boucle Saint-Denis, and died in the same town in 1963. After studying law, became initiated to painting at the Academy of his native town. Practiced art as a dilettante, in the wake of Flemish expressionism, destroying most of his works as soon as he finished them.

Exhibited non-figurative canvases in 1952 in Paris, at Jacques Dubourg's circle, then in 1959 at the Palace of Fine Arts in Brussels.

BIBLIOGRAPHY : Henri Maldiney. Preface to the catalogue for the exposition at the Galerie Dubourg, Paris, March 1952.

This is another artist — and a singular one — who assumes the double role of veteran and newcomer. It was only in 1952, when he was well into his fifties, that PHILIPPE MOREL showed works of an abstract charac-



78.

Victor SERVRANCKX

Opus 4, 1942, 22 x 28, oil on linen.

Private collection.



ter, conceived incidentally as a by-product of a conventional evolution in the field of expressionist realism. *Architecture of spots*, was the formula then used to define the character of his large canvases treated in broad velvety touches, in which the subject is swallowed up in an organization of masses swept up in whirling movements. Subsequently, Morel exhibited austere painting conceived in subdued ranges of color minutely distributed in a sinuous proliferation of tiny, crowded touches in which can be discerned the shades and the watered effects of puddles in rûts, autumn leaves crushed into damp ground, twilight gleams reflected in the shimmering of water — a whole shadowy life which is the product of the visual imagination much more than a reflection of immediate optical perceptions.

## SERVANCKX, VICTOR

Born in Diegem (Brussels) June 26, 1897. Studied at the Brussels Academy from 1913 to 1917. After his modern classical studies, Servanckx attended courses for five years at the Brussels Academy. He quickly became interested in the different artistic crafts and practiced them. For a long time, until 1925, he was artistic director of a big wall-paper firm and greatly influenced the evolution of this field. In collaboration with Huib Hoste, he designed an interior and functional furniture for the International Exposition of Decorative Arts in Paris in 1925. In 1935 he designed the governmental Commissariat General headquarters, including offices and reading room, in the official Belgian Pavilion at the Brussels Universal Exposition. In 1937, he executed a 550 square meter fresco for the Belgian section of the Salon de la Radio in Brussels. Fernand Léger called this « a milestone in the history of modern art ». Servanckx executed tapestries for the Count van der Burch and others. Co-founder of the art reviews « Opbouwen » and « Sept Arts ». Art critic. Professor at the Ecole des Arts Industriels et Décoratifs in Ixelles. Author of many articles in a large number of reviews and newspapers. Servanckx has given numerous lectures, on both ancient and modern art. A member of the Académie Royale of Belgium.

1917 : First exhibit of abstract works at the Galerie Giroux, which was also the first exhibit of non-figurative paintings in Belgium. — 1918 : Exhibition at the Galerie du Studio, the Galerie Sneyers and at the Doe Stil Voort art circle in Brussels. — 1924 : Exhibited 105 canvases at the Galerie Royale in Brussels in January, and at the Municipal Museum of Bielefeld, Germany ; painted « Opus I - 1924 », a monochrome canvas in gray, representing a nearly square rectangle ; gave up painting for a year to devote himself to architecture. — 1925 : Exhibited at the L'Art d'Aujourd'hui gallery in Paris with Picasso, Braque, Gris, Pevsner, Miro, Klee, Nicholson, van Doesburg and Mondrian ; at the request of Paul van Ostaïjen, exhibited at the Cabinet

Maldoror in Brussels. — 1926 : Exhibited at the Ça ira ! gallery in Antwerp ; was invited by the Société Anonyme, directed by Marcel Duchamp, to exhibit for more than a year in the principal museums of the United States. — 1928 : Exhibited at Herwarth Walden's Der Sturm gallery in Berlin ; exhibition at the Canard Sauvage circle in Brussels. — 1929 : Exhibited at the Palais des Beaux-Arts and at the Centaure gallery in Brussels. — 1931 : Exhibited with Baumeister, Schwitters and Kandisky at the Neue Frankfurt gallery in Germany. — 1934 : Exhibition at the Pulchri Studio in The Hague. — 1936 : Exhibited in Prague, Budapest, Brno and Bratislava. — 1946 : Participated, along with Baumeister, Braque, Gris, Klee, Léger, Lipchitz, Metzinger, Picasso and Zadkine, in the Cubism exhibit at the Galerie La Boétie in Brussels ; exhibited with Herbin at the Apollo gallery in Brussels. — 1947 : Big retrospective show at the Palais des Beaux-Arts in Brussels. — 1948 : Exhibition at Lydia Conti's gallery in Paris (exhibition organized by Léon Degand, who also wrote the catalogue preface) ; became a member of the Lydia Conti team, along with Schneider, Hartung and Soulages. — 1949 : Exhibition at the Vlaamse Club in Brussels, organized by Maurits Blicke ; participated in the inaugural exhibition of the São Paulo Museum in Brazil. — 1951 : Participated in the Visages présents exhibit in Knokke, at the Vingt Maîtres contemporains exhibit at the Galerie Apollo in Brussels. — 1954 : Participated in the first Les Premiers Abstraits Belges exhibit at the Galerie Saint-Laurent in Brussels, organized by Maurits Blicke, Delahaut and Toussaint ; participated in the Venice Biennial. — 1957 : Participated in the Pionniers de l'Art Abstrait exhibit, organized by Michel Seuphor at the Galerie Creuze in Paris on the occasion of the publication of his work « Dictionnaire de la peinture abstraite ». An exhibit to celebrate his sixtieth birthday at the Galerie Les Contemporains in Brussels (catalogue prefaced by Maurits Blicke and L.-L. Sosset ; speech by Emile Langui). — 1958 : The only Belgian to exhibit abstract painting at the 50 Years of Modern Art exhibit at the Universal Exposition of 1958 ; at the Palais des Beaux-Arts, exhibition Quelques Artistes Belges depuis Ensor ; retrospective at the Concertgebouw in Bruges, organized by the Raaklijn circle ; Prix de la Critique exhibit at the Palais des Beaux-Arts in Charleroi ; Art Actuel exhibit at the Galerie Europe, Brussels ; Les Artistes Belges exhibit at the Universal Exposition, Brussels ; Aspects de l'Art Belge Contemporain exhibition at the Atelier gallery in Antwerp ; La Peinture Flamande d'Aujourd'hui exhibit at the Museum of Tournai ; Exposition Mobile, « avant-garde » painting at the Les Contemporains gallery in Brussels. — 1959 : Participated in the Premiers Abstraits Belges exhibition at the Hessenhuis in Antwerp, organized by Maurits Blicke and Jo Delahaut with the collaboration of the G-58 group. — 1960 : 100 Jahre Belgische Kunst exhibit at the Haus des Kunst, Munich, Germany. — 1962 : Venice Biennial.

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Maurits Billeke, « Servranckx », Coll. Kunstenaars van Heden,  
Ed. Artistenfonds, Antwerp, 1961.

VICTOR SERVranckx is considered, in most of the writings on modern art, as "the pioneer of abstract art in Belgium." He was in fact, and this at a precocious age, the first painter in this country to paint abstract canvases. Throughout the period extending approximately from 1928 to 1945, he steadily continued brilliantly to defend non-figurative art, being the only artist in the country to remain faithful to it during those years. For this he was sometimes referred to as the "pope of abstract art," a title in which he took pride and which he fully deserves. At the Academy of Brussels he took part — within a period of four years — in eight regular competitions and each time won the first prize. In 1913 he won the Grand Prix de l'Académie, "with the jury's congratulations," but to the stretcher of the winning painting he applied a new canvas on which he painted an abstract composition. The gesture was symbolic: it was a final farewell and at the same time a new departure.

In the titles of the works painted in 1914 can be read the deep meaning of a whole *avant-garde* program: *Eurythmic composition: a woman's curves*, and *The golden number of the ovoids in space reduced to the unity of the horizontal plane*. A model student at the Academy, in the solitude of his studio Servranckx was an experimenter wholly unknown to the public and one who himself was unaware of the fact that there were painters abroad who were making experiments similar to his own. During the academic year 1912-1913, he studied the laws of construction in the Flemish primitives, he discovered negro art, composed collages, and executed canvases which were later to be characterized as dadaist, and he also looked into the practical possibilities of *pure form*. And in 1917 he showed, at the Galerie Giroux, a few purely abstract canvases: the first non-figurative works to be exhibited in Belgium. Three years later, in 1920, Marinetti described Servranckx as "a powerful and original talent." What was it, during the decade 1910-1920, that pushed Servranckx and

other painters to paint abstract canvases? When he was barely sixteen, and while he was still attending courses at the Academy, Servranckx was hired by a large wall-paper firm, which had acquired a high opinion of his color sense. It was here, in 1913, that he had a real revelation as he was watching colors being mixed in enormous vats. The thousand forms and shades that they assumed as they waved and whirled affected the young artist to such a point that he had an intuition of the emotive possibilities of color and form when freed from any representation of nature.

Rapidly promoted to an important post in the above-mentioned plant, Servranckx through his numerous projects exerted a deep influence on the evolution of wall-paper in Europe. (One of his papers was used by Juan Gris in one of his collages.) The factory on the other hand revealed to Servranckx the universe of the machine. It taught him the meticulous work that has to be done on the drafting table. It placed him in direct contact with the hectic activity of modern industry, with its problems, its setbacks, and its triumphs.

Restless and eager, Servranckx until 1920 or thereabout explored various paths. His dadaist and abstract canvases were not understood by the critics, passed unnoticed or were refused by the so-called modern exhibitions.

After 1920, Servranckx developed a more severe form. In the *pure form* of this period each element taken separately corresponded, as in a machine, to a deep necessity. But at the same time each element must be in harmony, from the point of view both of form and of color, with the sober two-dimensional whole into which it is integrated. The golden section pushed Servranckx toward the absolute, toward liberation from matter and weight. Accident and superfluity are pitilessly excluded from this balance, which is striking for its dynamism. After four years of labor he had achieved perfect order. The link connecting the various elements of the composition had become altogether clear, the comparisons between the forms were reduced to their simplest relations. At this point Servranckx went to the limit: he painted his *Opus I - 1924*, the squarest rectangle, in a single shade, namely a monochrome gray. Confused by this extreme experiment, and enthusiastic at the same time, the artist took time off for reflection.

There was born in him the fear of seeing painting becoming fixed in a formula which would lead many young abstract painters in the direction of a decorative art: a dishonored and dishonoring art, the most dangerous enemy, Servranckx said, of a pure complete art.





79.  
Victor SERVranckx  
Opus 5, 1919, 63 x 49, gouache-collage.  
Private collection.

Honest with himself as with others, he wished to test in practice his theories concerning a community art. He wanted to test how far and in what way an object of common use can and should be *beautiful*. He devoted the whole year of 1925 to the study of this question and drew plans of amazing originality and freshness. They concern architecture as well as furniture and various branches of the applied arts, called minor arts, including even purely utilitarian objects, like a tobacco jar. A sincere admirer of mass production methods, he executed hundreds of anonymous industrial designs. In the ornamental realm, as in all others, he rejected any figurative tendency.

For the International Exposition of Decorative Arts, organized in Paris in 1925, he designed, in collaboration with Huib Hoste, a plan for a functional and organic interior, devoid of any individualism. Each element is irreplaceable, each detail indispensable. In 1935 he designed for the official Pavilion of the Universal Exposition of Brussels the entire furnishing of an office and a reading room, as well as a great tapestry: The latter was to revolutionize the manufacturing technique of modern tapestry: whereas certain tapestries in the Belgian Pavilion had as many as 13,000 hues of wool, Servranckx obtained an equally rich effect of colors by using only 27 flat tints.

In 1936, the artist made one of his dearest dreams come true: a 550 square-meter fresco for the National Radio-broadcasting Institute, at the Radio Exposition. Having heard of this impressive feat — one of the largest paintings ever executed — Fernand Léger came to Brussels and wrote shortly afterwards, in *Clarté*: "It is in my opinion a very important piece of work — a milestone in the history of modern mural art, by virtue both of its dimensions and its qualities. The result is remarkable and worth meditating."

But we must go back for a moment. After the static period, devoted to the glorification of technical progress and the new image of the world resulting from it, Servranckx suddenly gave free rein to his imagination. In this movement of reaction his intelligence, his sentiments, his instincts — all the wealth of his conscious and subconscious nature — broke loose irresistibly. He went back to his first experiments of the years 1917-1918. His visionary power and his cosmic poetry were given a full field and triumphed in canvases in which, at the same time, philosophical preoccupations can be discerned.

In these works, time and space form an amazing equilibrium. They show geometric planes and billowing

waves, masses of marble crisscrossed by veins and shadows, bold harmonies of colors, gradations of delicate hues and suddenly a red and strident cry. What is striking about the organic structure of these canvases is the disconcerting diversity of the universe of materials, of elements, of cosmic spaces, of what soars above the clouds, of what lies hidden or swarms beneath the earth, of everything that stirs and bursts, animated with life. The tumult of elementary forces is projected on the canvases in fantastic and noval visions, while the metaphysical obsessions are conveyed in dream-like spectacles.

Such was the art of Servranckx at this period, revealing a painter of exuberant personality and mature craftsmanship, an artist deeply impressed by scientific and technical discoveries, sensitive and attentive to the ideological and philosophic revolutions that shook his age. His clairvoyant eyes pierced through the wall of reality. In our modern painting, it is he who has succeeded in grasping the invisible and making it visible. He glorifies the vital phenomenon as it manifests itself in man, in the animal and in the plant worlds. In so doing, he sometimes shows its apparent and its hidden reality simultaneously. It is a disconcerting synthesis of a universe progressively discovered, a prophetic representation of worlds in the process of becoming and in the process of vanishing. In this manner the mysterious image of things and concepts that escape our classifications emerges. A dizzying image into which enter the suggestive transpositions of bacteria, atoms, and protoplasm. Like a radar, the dream of the artist of the twentieth century detects and identifies the mysteries of the forces of nature. He prefigures the life that is developing, he projects in his work the often anguishing image of times to come, he gives concrete form to the anxiety that will characterize the climate of the years following the horrors of the Second World War. The champion of a new art gives form to a new beauty. It is his *sense of order*, as he calls it, his sense of organized inspiration and of spiritualized matter that produces his fantastic art. He wants the new beauty to be active beauty. It has been said that Servranckx confronts us directly with mystery and that he knows nothing of all the painters who have painted before him. "The strangest canvases I have ever seen — and I have really seen a lot — are certainly Servranckx's", writes Urbain van de Voorde. "These canvases are like anatomical sections, topographical maps, lunar landscapes revealed by a telescope, apocalyptic visions."





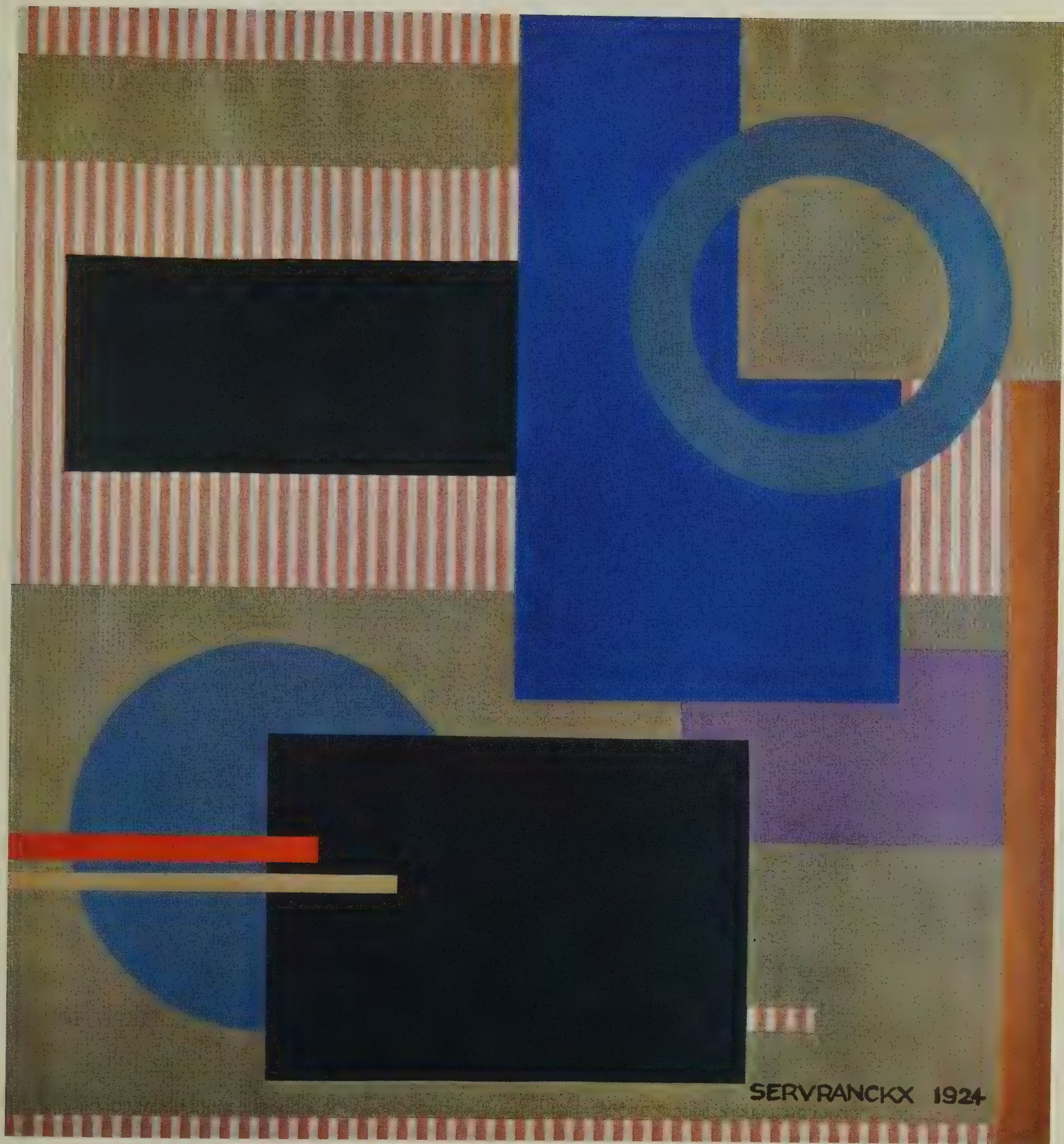
80.  
 Victor SERVranckx  
 Opus 11, 1920, 30 x 30, oil on linen.  
 Private collection.



1922 SERVranckx

81.  
Victor SERVranckx  
Opus 20, 1922  
70 x 45, oil on linen.  
Private collection.





SERVANCKX 1924

82.  
Victor SERVANCKX  
Opus 20, 1924, 62 x 58 1/2, collage.  
Private collection.



Meanwhile Servranckx painted figurative canvases which can be considered among the best of their kind. Was it as a challenge to the detractors of abstract art? A few years after the Second World War, when order and peace had returned, there reappeared in Servranckx's work canvases in the "pure form" vein. Composed of a restricted number of plastic themes and executed in a limited range of colors, they testify to a sublime clarity, to a serene assurance and to a triumphant harmony. In these canvases technique and imagination balance perfectly, daring never goes beyond good taste, diversity at no time excludes the stamp of personality.

This is not the place to speak of Servranckx the sculptor. We may merely recall that Moholy-Nagy, speaking of the work *Opus I - 1921*, in No. 14 of the review *Bauhausbücher*, in an article entitled *Von Material zu Architektur*, wrote that it was unquestionably the masterpiece of abstract sculpture of this period. Nor can we speak here of Servranckx's thousands of freehand drawings, of his art in the raw, of his tapestries, his lectures, his critical articles and his activity and influence as teacher and essayist. The laudatory writings devoted to him, in Belgium and abroad, testify by their number to the importance accorded to his work. The critics and historians of abstract art lay stress on the forcefulness of his personality, on the originality of his pictorial vision. They pay tribute to the constancy of his creative power, to the scope of his imagination, to the refinement of his taste. They salute in him the great pioneer whose work, in its vastness and variety, provides early examples of numerous tendencies in contemporary art, ranging from the soberest constructivism to non-formal lyricism, not forgetting the explosions of *tachisme* long before this school was launched elsewhere with a great fanfare of publicity.

After all his colleagues — Seuphor, Vantongerloo, Lacasse, Closon, Lempereur-Haut, Delhez — had run away to Paris or some other artistic center, while other artists had turned away from the abstract school, Servranckx carried on, single-handed in the Belgium-desert, a battle which lasted twenty-five years. With the indestructible faith and tenacity of an apostle, he waged this battle against a body of critics who considered his work "premature", against the promoters of "modernist" trends who anxiously clung to figurative art, against the official Agencies, which for thirty-five years ignored every form of abstract art, against the younger artists who scarcely knew Servranckx's name when they discovered the abstract school in 1950. Would it not have

been wiser for Servranckx to have accepted Moholy-Nagy's repeated invitations, and gone to the Bauhaus in Dessau, or later to the New Bauhaus in Chicago? Undoubtedly he refused those pressing invitations because he considered that he had a social role to fulfill in his own country. Indeed, however individualistic the formal aspect of Servranckx's art may be, it is nevertheless he who wrote: "Art is not a personal property. The artist is no greater a creator than the prism that disperses and refracts beautiful light rays. Art is everywhere: abundantly distributed and molecular. Emotion penetrates us as air passes through a corridor. We draw and paint, impelled by an obscure urge, while our muscles mysteriously communicate with our subconscious. When I sign a painting *Servranckx Opus 3 - 1927*, it is solely in order later to know its date. I have not the slightest property rights in a work to which I have simply obeyed."

Servranckx has never drawn back before a piece of work or an intuition. And we can agree with Marcel Duchateau when he wrote, in 1958: "When we go back to the source from which Servranckx's art sprang, it becomes obvious that by its very origin this art could only be abstract. Servranckx was predestined to paint abstractly. Even if he had painted his first canvases 15 years earlier, they would have been abstract. In Diegem, people remember non-figurative statuettes which Servranckx, as a child, impelled by some creative instinct, executed in potter's clay, modeling clay, wood, iron, or other material. Is it not legitimate, then, to think that these figurines were not the result of passing impressions, but already the fruit of an intuition which has continued to inspire the artist since his earliest youth? Intuitively, he had a presentiment of what he would achieve later. Abstract art, for him, is not "a way of painting, but a way of living, or, to put it better, of reliving old realities with all the freshness of youth."

Anyone who tries to grasp Servranckx's work in all its fullness will realize the difficulty of his undertaking. He will be forced to conclude, with Marcel Duchateau: "When I reread tomorrow what I have written about Servranckx today, I shall have the irritating impression that the essential — what absolutely had to be said — has again vanished. And I have the feeling that it is only in a century or two that the last word will have been said about his work. Does not the fact that I have thus failed prove clearly that Servranckx is one of the greatest artists of our time?"

It would seem that the combination of intelligence, of spirit, of feeling, of technique, of intuition, and of will





83.  
Victor SERVFRANCKX  
Opus 2, 1949, 30 x 30, oil on linen.  
Private collection.



84.

Victor SERVranckx  
Opus 4, 1955, 146 x 82, oil on linen.  
Private collection.



in a single personality might well predestine such a personality to express both the order and the chaos of the cosmos.

Servranckx's work offers us on the one hand a profound recreation of a world which the machine and technics are transforming, and on the other hand the metamorphosis of a universe whose essential secrets we are learning to penetrate. At one time classical and static, reflective and studied, at others lyrical, romantic, and spontaneous, Servranckx's work oscillates between these two poles which Seuphor has designated *the style* and *the cry*. Going from one extreme to the other, the pioneer of abstract art in Belgium has achieved a work which takes its place in the very front rank of contemporary painting.

## LEWY, KURT

Born in Essen (Germany) in 1898. Studied first in his native town, then in the Berlin Advanced Institute of Decorative Arts. Perfected himself, in 1924, in the technique of enamel work, in Pforzheim (Baden). Returned to Essen the following year, and taught there at the Folkwangschule from 1929 to 1933. Settled in Brussels in 1935 to escape the Nazi regime. Interned in the camps of Gurs and Saint-Cyprien during the war (1940-1944). Obtained Belgian nationality in 1951. — A member of the Art Abstrait group.

Exhibits frequently in Belgium and in Germany as well as in London, New York and other centers. — Is represented in Belgian and foreign public and private collections. — Interests himself in applied arts. — Creator of the stained-glass windows of the new synagogue in Essen (1959).

BIBLIOGRAPHY : « L., Maler, Grafiker, Emailleur », Ed. Folkwangschule für Gestaltung, Essen, 1959. Contains texts by H. Schardt, H. Feldbusch, L.-L. Sosset, Samuel C. Miller.

KURT LEWY broke away in 1952 from the figurative references that had presided over his evolution up to that time. In his youth, his art had been stimulated by the expressionist approach prevailing beyond the Rhine at that time. Then he had turned to allegorical evocations, stripped of temporal references, borrowed from the Biblical and mythological repertory, before adopting, immediately after the last war, a discipline of graphic decantation whose themes as well as treatment indicate a curious restraint in regard to any show of expansiveness or exuberance.

It was the withdrawal behind the shelter of this prudence that constituted the point of departure for the development that led him to his first abstract compositions. The attraction or inner tranquility and the sense of moderation shown in his painting can be

discerned in the regularity of the guiding lines as well as in the smoothness of the surfaces of his paintings. In order to establish the genesis of this orientation, however, we can hardly lose sight of the fact that some thirty years before, Kurt Léwy had executed delicate miniatures in enamel for the decoration of jewels and objects in which he had relied solely on the harmonious handling of colors and lines. Thus he was renewing contact, on a more considered basis, with an experience already perceived, if not in its intrinsic value, at least in its application.

In his paintings, his water-colors, his enamels — all three of which have solicited him equally — the straight line began to assume clear and definite responsibilities. In the patterns of verticals and diagonals, light or heavy by turns, it determined the pale-toned flat tints and the distribution of their partitioning. The methodic quality of the execution assigns delicate inflections to this patient rigor whose secret mechanism enables us to apprehend the spiritual distance that the artist interposes between the mental structure of his vocabulary and life's demands.

When the curve took its place in this dialectics of discretion, we might even say of dissimulation, based even more on a program of elimination and refusal than on relations of possession, it assumed a special importance and even an appearance of strangeness. One became aware of a feeling of release in the compositions in which it occurred, and in a certain sense of the beginning of a new situation. The forms became more definite, planes took the place of linear perimeters and assumed greater importance in the formal context. The contrasty arrangement of their chromatic overlappings thus became more and more complex.

It can therefore be said that the reassuring sensation of fixedness which for a long time conditioned Kurt Léwy's art has given way to an incisive anxiety which reveals itself as much in the interweaving of planes that vanish, overlap, open and blend as in the interpretation of color registers whose modulations and dissonances testify, in turn, to a similar assertion of will.

## DE BOECK, FELIX

Born in Drogenbos, January 12, 1898. After doing Greek and Latin classical studies, he studied the history of art at the University of Brussels. Collaborated in the reviews « Sept Arts » and « Het Overzicht » (1921).



85  
Kurt LEWY  
Composition 188  
1961-1962  
116 x 80  
oil on linen.  
Private  
collection.

KL  
24



Took part in group exhibitions : « Doe Stil Voort », Brussels, 1916 ; Musée d'Art Moderne of Brussels, 1917 and 1918. — One-man shows in Paris, in 1928 ; in Brussels, in 1952, a retrospective at the Galerie Giroux.

BIBLIOGRAPHY : Jan Walravens, « Félix de Boeck », Ed. De Sikkell, Antwerp, 1952.

One has the impression that FELIX DE BOECK, a highly original artist, has throughout his life painted in accordance with a plan that he had laid out for himself on the threshold of his adulthood. There have been no caprices to lead him from one style to another, no yielding to the inspiration of the moment, no adventurous experiments, with one exception, involving unusual materials. Nothing was ever to distract him from the line he had traced out for himself at about the age of twenty — neither grief for the loss of those most dear to him, nor the fact that his work was soon to fall outside the artistic currents in favor, nor especially the indifference or the contempt which the most reputable critics and his colleagues were to show toward his canvases. In the initial plan of Félix De Boeck's work abstract art occupies a special place.

This son of Brabantine peasants, who had been familiar with country life and animals since his earliest childhood, chose to study Greek and Latin, and thereupon attended August Vermeylen's course on the history of art for two years. The death of his parents and his brothers obliged him prematurely to interrupt his studies and to run the farm he had inherited. Having married, he experienced difficult times and suffered unhappiness. The artist who between 1916 and 1918 had participated in all the *avant-garde* movements of this period of effervescence, who was a friend of Frits Van den Berghe, Paul van Ostaïjen and Piet Mondrian, suddenly withdrew from artistic circles and went into total seclusion, in which he would face only the universe of colors.

From this point on there gathered round Félix De Boeck a growing circle of friends, among whom, however, there was hardly a single painter, but numerous artists, young and old, as well as art lovers belonging to all circles. These admirers faithfully followed the work that was being pursued in the isolation of the magic farm of Drogenbos where De Boeck carried on a secret *tête-à-tête* with painting.

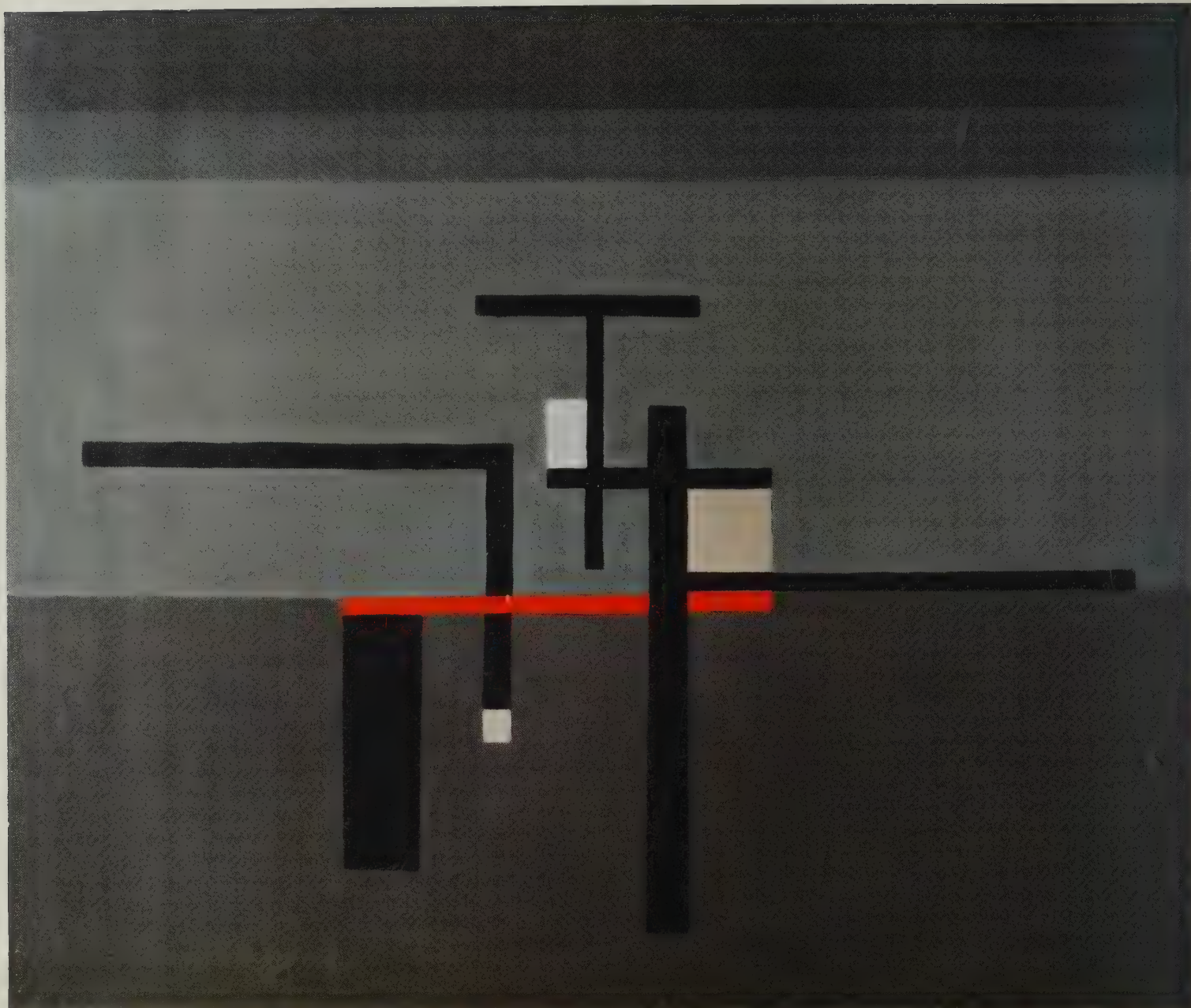
It was in the course of the First World War that Félix De Boeck plunged into painting, with a slightly mad violence : a foolhardy Rik Wouters, intoxicated with the joy of living, who found a greater thrill in Vincent van Gogh's contrasted coloration than in Cézanne's balance of forms. This was an expressionist period in

which light already played a predominant role. A light full of the sun that rises and sets on a fertile earth above the vigorous trees of Brabant. At this same period De Boeck composed portraits. Built solely by means of exacerbated red lines, they express at one and the same time a psychological torment and spiritual force.

The encounter with abstract painting occurs about 1919. The discovery of the autonomous use of color seems also to have been that of De Boeck's future. Was this revelation the culmination of an effort of reflection or was it the result of an intuition ? Only the painter himself could tell us. In any case he learned to consider abstraction, with everything that it assumes of freshness, of originality and of purity, as the basis and the foundation of his art. Whereas Victor Servranckx, stimulated by the example of Fernand Léger, was presently to establish a link between our technical civilization and the geometric planes as well as the glazed colorations of his canvases, while Joseph Peeters by his ingenious compositions suggested the city and the feverish life of modern man, Félix De Boeck showed in his very first non-figurative works only *lines and colors, assembled in a certain order*. His painting, as we see, cannot be said to be non-figurative in the sense that it evokes some reality of the universe that surrounds us, through a play of lines and colors which at the same time do not represent this reality. His work is abstract because in it the lines, the colors and the volumes constitute a new language. De Boeck delicately juxtaposes subdued grays and browns, pale yellows and blues. Colored circles rise like soap bubbles. The relations that the artists establishes among the geometric figures are sensitive and surprising, but never become dramatic. They always remain within the limits of a gentle and delicate poetry. Thus the painter creates that universe of freshness and of joy which the canvas forms.

The abstract compositions extend approximately over the years 1919-1922. Those we are fortunate to be able to reproduce here are among the finest. Aside from their unmistakable decorative character, De Boeck's non-figurative paintings are imbued with a poetic intensity which, without being the result of a formal ingenuity as great as that of Paul Klee, proceeds from a somewhat similar freshness of coloration.

But De Boeck's art continued to evolve. Now the painting grew round a set of diagonals connected in the center by a colored spot. Between the diagonals stretched horizontal planes whose coloration — pink, yellow, blue — had a single tonality, and whose tints, as in a



86.  
Félix DE BOECK  
Composition 3, 1920  
60 x 72, oil on wood.  
Private collection.





87.  
Félix DE BOECK  
Composition 8, 1923  
60 x 72, oil on wood.  
Private collection.



88.  
Félix DE BOECK  
Composition 1, 1919  
72 x 29, oil on wood.  
Private collection.



prism, were scaled from light to dark. Thus shaded round a brilliant center, they wonderfully suggested the pure radiance of the intense light of the sun. In this universe of sunlight life would slowly revive. In his chromatic structure Félix De Boeck would catch a raindrop, a grain of wheat, a tree, a cross and presently an insect, a bird, an animal. While it cannot be claimed that these canvases show an abandonment of abstraction, they do in any case mark a going beyond the zero point, beyond the supreme moment of the geometric planes and lines, of the simplified, yet very delicate tonalities. It was at that time that the painter undertook the execution of a certain number of series : a single composition was to be treated in different tonalities, each one based on one of the basic colors and its complementaries.

Quite naturally, among the six or seven paintings in a given thematic series, one range will appeal more than the others. But all of them are equal in freshness of vision and in purity of coloration.

De Boeck was later to turn away from abstract art, and the works which he then produced do not come within the scope of the present work. We may point out, however, that the artist continued to work out in detail the plan he had set himself in 1922. Is it not extraordinary that he was able to do so with unfailing sensitivity ? For even though his art is deliberate at the outset, he always exploits all the possibilities of the moment for its execution. This confers upon his paintings a remarkable presence. Here are the familiar animals — the bull, the cock, the pigeon. Here is man — the tormented self-portret, the placid work companions, the mother, calm and gentle. Next we find figures in action — the peasant digging, the mother giving birth, the priest officiating. On a higher level we find the saints venerated by the artist : the Crucified One, Father Damien dying, Ruusbroeck the blessed, and also Gandhi, Heinenmann and van Gogh. Finally, the environment in which the artist lives offers him themes : the place which for forty years has witnessed the growth of a work of a quality which is uneven, to be sure, but often amazing, the little farm situated in the broad Brabantine landscape, beneath the starry sky and close to the church in which, in accordance with the artist's Christian faith, the heart of Christ burns eternally. It was at this point, in 1952, that De Boeck closed the circle which had unremittingly obsessed his art and his thinking. At this moment he completed *The Creation*, which he seemed to feel compelled to recapitulate, so to speak, on his own account. It was a gigantic undertaking,

according to some, puerile according to others. An undertaking, as to which some have said that it was unique in modern art. Although the rather mediocre quality of many of the canvases that De Boeck has piled up in his studio is all too obvious, his art stirs us by its plastic value, its original and engaging evocation of light, by the irradiation of its fresh and subtle colorations, by its graphic element composed almost solely of circles, and finally by its humanity. To this must be added the experiments — which can stir our enthusiasm for a moment — with phosphorescent colors which, in the light of a blue lamp, bring out a second painting before our astonished eyes.

But what must be stressed first of all, within the framework of the present book, is the important role played by the specifically abstract part in the work of Félix De Boeck as a whole. Here abstraction is not a culmination but a beginning. And this beginning has the freshness and the beauty of early morning, at the dawn of a life or at the origin of an adventure. Thus abstraction derives its beauty from its sole formal attributes. Colors and lines seem to be applied here for the very first time to a canvas or a panel. It is this that gives to De Boeck's work an accent which is unique in the whole of Flemish abstract painting. And it may well be thought that it was during his non-figurative period that the artist painted his most valid canvases.

## MEES, JOSEPH

Born in Ghent, April 7, 1898. Architect, decorator and painter. Studied at the Academy of Fine Arts of his native town.

Exhibitions in Ghent, Brussels and Paris.

BIBLIOGRAPHY : Henry Gaby-Charles, in « *Aujourd'hui* », 1961.

JOSEPH MEES was won over to abstract art in 1952. Rather loosely composed, his canvases present heavy surfaces of color, although the various tonalities produce highly poetic effects at their tangential points. Later, his work gained in lightness. By a delicate use of white tints, he introduced an element suggesting water or light. This liquid element, flowing gently on dark red and blue backgrounds, evoked the brightness of sunlight or the limpidity of spring water. The suggestive power of his canvases thus acquired greater depth. What he represents, at his best, has warmth, movement and is flooded with light.





89  
Joseph MEES  
Painting, 1962, 115 x 120, oil on linen.  
The artist collection.



His art, because of this, has a fine decorative effect, at the same time preserving a vigor that excludes all frivolity. Without ever being overdone, the composition becomes more studied. The painter draws on his poet's sensitivity in reconciling the solidity of the volume and the coloration with the freshness of the effects of light. These qualities will be recognized without difficulty in the work reproduced here and dated 1962. With its deep red planes and its subtle play of light, it offers a typical example of the contradictory and yet complementary qualities of Mees's art.

#### MICHAUX, HENRI

Born in Namur, May 24, 1899. Known especially as a poet and prose-writer (his first writing appeared in Franz Hellens's « Le Disque Vert » in 1922), he is also a painter, a water-colorist and a draftsman. Settled in Paris since 1923, and has acquired French nationality. A great traveler.

One-man shows since 1937, in Paris, Basel, Brussels, etc

BIBLIOGRAPHY OF THE PAINTER : Alain Jouffroy, « Henri Michaux », Ed. Le Musée de Poche, Paris 1962. — BIBLIOGRAPHY OF THE POET : André Gide, « Découvrons Henri Michaux », Ed. Gallimard, Paris 1944. — Philippe de Coulon, « Henri Michaux », Coll. Poètes de notre Société, Paris 1949, etc. — BIBLIOGRAPHY OF THE POET AND THE PAINTER : René Bertelé, « Henri Michaux », Ed. Seghers, Paris 1849 ; « Henri Michaux », Ed. Gallimard, Paris 1961.

In his poetic travel book, *Ecuador*, dated 1929, HENRI MICHAUX tells us : "You can find your own truth just as well by looking at any wall-paper for forty-eight hours..." These prophetic words already contain the entire aesthetic credo of the young Spaniard Tapiès and his famous school, but one might nevertheless wonder whether Michaux already at that time was looking for his own truth by looking at a worn-out wall-paper or a crumbling wall. From what we know, it seems more likely that truth for him at that time was confined to the realm of words. Later on he was to learn that the



90.  
Henri MICHAUX  
Drawing, 1960, 78 x 109,  
pen and China ink.  
Daniel Cordier Gallery, Paris.







plastic arts express more and better than words. He has given his views on this subject, in his short but pertinent introduction to the exhibition *Vitalità nell'Arte*, in which he writes: "When I began to paint, my country came back to me, my country of the cloud and the undefined, but not alone, for there appeared larval faces, phantoms of bodies or of nature, but always vague and ready to turn back into cloud."

The result is that not only his own truth imposes itself upon him through the works that he drew or painted, but also a more exact vision and a more exact sensation of men. Painting made him the gift of himself and of others in the pure state. One can therefore readily guess to what kind of form the pictorial work of this great poet belongs. An act of faith, the diary of a soul. Not written with words (*words always make one say too much*), but suggested by a pressing whole of blurred backgrounds, of tiny, monstrous faces, of uncertain apparitions, of hazy features and signs, of vague spots of color.

Originally all this still resembled fairly closely the kind of rapid sketch that the writer negligently scrawled on his manuscript. Later this universe of Quasimodos, of bent-over trees, of shadowy plants, of frightening insects, was better launched. The figures themselves hardly varied throughout his pictorial work. In fact, these have hardly moved but their arrangement was more thought-out while their dynamism became more ample. The sheet of paper, with its innumerable little strokes and little spots like so many demoniacal creatures, sometimes warriors with heavy armor, at other times startled insects, is like an immense battlefield at the moment of the attack or of the rout, like the drops of sweat, black and baroque, dripping down on a forehead shiny as a television screen. But for his drawings, let us listen to Henri Michaux himself: "Here I found a new way to live... in the very vitality of life, solely in its signs of vitality." Is the essential kernel of life itself touched here? We hesitate to say so even though Michaux's drawings and paintings so closely resemble the ceaseless dance of electrons and protons as we see them in scientific films. What is certain is that here we have Henri Michaux's innermost truth, and that of all those who, like him, live in the fragile equilibrium of an ever anxious imagination.

The three works reproduced in the present book offer three remarkable aspects of Michaux's pictorial production. The India ink drawing shows how tumultuous and strained his art is. The gouache proves the technical possibilities of the artist whose art, delicate and stripped

of everything that is accessory, disturbs and touches us. *Mescalinian drawing* belongs to the graphic and written experiments that Michaux undertook under the influence of drugs. Here the expression of his ego has a note of anguish.

## WOLFS, HUBERT.

Born in Malines in 1899, died in the same town in 1937.

Self-taught painter. — After having painted abstract canvases, he executed surrealist and expressionist works. — In 1927 participated in the Assaut group exhibit in Brussels. — Represented in the Museums of Ghent and Malines. — His motto: « Sentimental interpretation of the spectacle of things ».

BIBLIOGRAPHY: Michel Seuphor, « Un renouveau de la peinture en Belgique flamande », Paris, Ed. Les Tendances Nouvelles, 1932.

HUBERT WOLFS divided his time between painting and his trades as watchmaker and shoemaker. In the poorly lighted attic of an old Malines house, he executed canvases which were sometimes dadaist or cubist, at other times in the neo-plastic or surrealist vein. Although he was for a certain period a student at the Academy in his native town, he must be considered to be largely self-taught. He underwent the influence of many great predecessors. "Not as concerns the spirit, but solely in the matter of themes," Walter Volkaert writes. Not only in 1920, but also in the years that followed — and undoubtedly following the example of his friend Prosper De Troyer — Wolfs executed a few abstract works. In 1930 he even painted a canvas which today would be classified as *action painting*.

## FLOUQUET, PIERRE-LOUIS

Born in Paris February 21, 1900. Came to Belgium with his parents when he was very young and experienced difficult years. His gifts as a writer and painter became evident while he was still an adolescent.

Gave his first exhibition in 1919. — Worked in collaboration with the brothers Pierre and Victor Bourgeois, the poet and the architect, on the weekly « Sept Arts » (1922-1928). — Appeared in numerous avant-garde group exhibits



92.  
Henri MICHAUX  
Body-colour, 1956, 57 x 38.  
Particular collection, Paris.



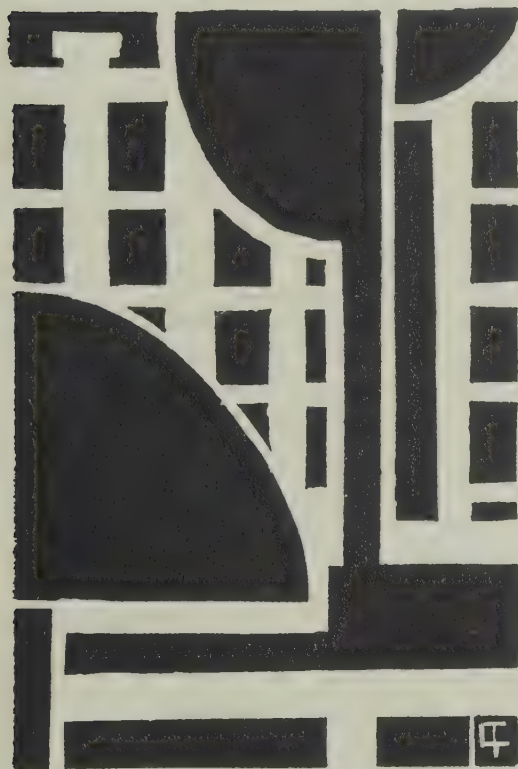
in Brussels, Paris and in other countries where he likewise held several one-man shows, in Berlin (Der Sturm gallery, 1925) and in America in particular. — Between-times, has illustrated various books. — A long journalistic, literary and poetic career marked especially by the creation of the « Journal des poètes » in 1931.

BIBLIOGRAPHY : Paul Werrie : « L'Œuvre créatrice et critique du peintre Flouquet », Ed. L'Equerre, Brussels, undated. — Special No. of « La Nerve », VI/1928, Braine-le-Comte. — Raymond Poreye : « P.-L. Flouquet », Collection « Convertis du XXe siècle », Ed. Foyer Notre-Dame, Brussels, undated.

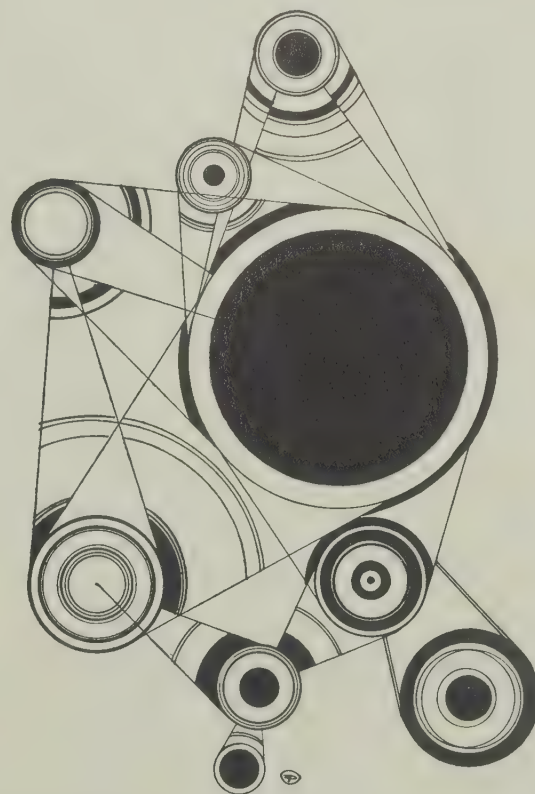
Solicited by his curiosity in many directions, eager above all to participate in the creative adventures of his time, PIERRE-LOUIS FLOUQUET naturally assumes a place

are reflected as much as the programs of *De Stijl* and of *L'Esprit Nouveau*. His compositions, in their arranged juxtapositions of straight lines and curves, thus reflected the constructivist orthodoxy in favor at the time in certain innovating circles. They take their place, consequently, in the *pure form* current which left its mark on many artists of his generation, Baumeister as well as Léger. "The will to construct is an integral part of the passion to live," Flouquet wrote, thus indicating the importance he attributes to the systematic and precise order of guiding patterns.

The most striking feature in his work is the importance he assigns to the rhythmic balance of the colored forms



93.  
Pierre-Louis FLOUQUET  
Lino, 1922, 11 1/2 x 7 1/2.  
M.S. collection, Paris.



94.  
Pierre-Louis FLOUQUET  
Drawing, about 1927, 29 x 21.  
M.S. collection, Paris.

among the veterans of the first abstract experiments. From 1920 he was practicing a painting strictly and consciously organized, based on an animated geometry in which the typical influences of cubism and of futurism

and to the symmetry of their distribution. Pure flat tints enclosed in their stable frames cut the surface and the space into regular elements, which corresponds to a search for harmony and visual repose. Many of his



95.  
ORIX  
Mytomanie « Exuberant emergency »  
1962, 130 x 97, oil on linen.  
Private collection.



paintings, incidentally, have been conceived with the idea in the back of his mind that he might some day collaborate in the decoration of modern buildings — an ambition which has not materialized, but the principle of which has made some headway since then.

His career in the path of abstraction assumes several aspects: synthetic stylization based on figuration, perceptive equivalences taken out of the human context, formal themes given over to the combined resources of movement and fixedness. About 1928, Flouquet, whose forms of expression have always been in the process of change, took a new direction and developed other concepts: portraits of writers and artists, distorted faces, dramatic and mystical visions. From this time on he exhibited only rarely and finally withdrew entirely from painting, other interests having challenged his combative vigilance and his inexhaustible ardor.

## ORIX

The pseudonym of Guillaume Hoorickx, born in Antwerp in 1900. Studied tropical medicine at the Colonial School. Self-taught as a painter: portraits executed in 1941, in the Resistance, at Lasne-Chapelle-Saint-Lambert. Deported to Mauthausen (Austria) where he twice escaped death. Repatriated in 1945, he soon settled in Nice, and subsequently in Paris.

Has participated in several group exhibitions in Belgium, in France and in other countries. — One-man shows in Brussels, Paris, London, Milan, Antwerp, Bochum, etc.

BIBLIOGRAPHY: Eric Newton, « Time and Tide », vol. 36, No. 37, September 1955, p. 1170. — Edmond Humeau, « Art Témoïn », No. 1, Paris, January 1962. — Frank Popper, Preface to the Städtische Kunstgalerie exhibition catalogue, Bochum, March 1962.

It was undoubtedly in order to overcome the great depression of the terrible years of the war that ORIX decided to liberate himself from the contingencies of representation — the tragic scenes of the extermination camps and their hallucinatory effects on the emotions and on the organism — which for three years had served as an outlet for his obsession. After 1949 he began to abandon self-revelation, to use ideograms which he dissociates from their geometric origin and which in 1952 lead to curious compositions with jagged contours, fixed to the stability of the background, which he calls *Mindscales*, or landscapes of the mind.

Although his aptitudes as a painter do not come too effectively to the fore during this period, the strategy to which he has recourse in order to approach the structures of abstraction from the angle of strangeness is extremely challenging. As these works multiplied, however, their conception developed with longer and more radiant resonances. To such a point that these *Mindscales* presently (in 1955) appeared as emblematic ruins modeled by meditation...

Orix's art has recently shown a remarkable development in his *Drowned Jutes*, a process which consists of an assemblage of canvases of different textures, whose superpositions, frayings, folds, variations of relief, are integrated into the backgrounds on which the color, spread in fluid layers and light hues, imposes a harmonic order of fresh sharpness. These compositions are particularly revealing of the experimental approach which Orix has constantly shown as well as of the quivers of anxious life that have constantly vivified the field of action of his freedom of initiative.

## MAES, KAREL

Born in Mol on December 25, 1900. 1910-1915: Art school in Anderlecht and Brussels Academy. 1918: Impressionism, neo-impressionism, fauvism, cubism. 1918-1920: First abstract canvases. 1920: Received the visit of Theo van Doesburg.

1920-1925: Exhibits in Antwerp, Geneva, Bruges, Brussels, Monza, etc. Contributed to « Lumière », « Ruimte », « Ça ira ! », « Het Overzicht », « Der Sturm », « De Stijl », « Sept Arts », « La Nervie », « Das Werk », etc. Succeeded Herman Teirlinck as manager of a furniture factory and became a decorator. — 1925: Withdrew from artistic life and began designing rugs, furniture, stained-glass windows, etc. — 1950: Destroyed many of his works and left for the Congo. — Continues to manufacture furniture and is painting again. — Six linoleums-prints by Karel Maes were published by « De Driehoeck », Antwerp, 1925. — Karel Maes, in collaboration with J.-E. Verheyen, published « Kunst en Tekenen, een boek voor opvoeders van kinderen uit de eerste schoolleeftijd ».

BIBLIOGRAPHY: Michel Seuphor, « Dictionnaire de la peinture abstraite », Paris 1952. — Georges Marlier, « Kunstgeschiedenis der Nederlanden. — Maurice Casteels, « La Cité », vol. VI. — Michel Seuphor, « Het Overzicht », September 1922. — Pierre-Louis Flouquet, « L'Art Vivant », October 1, 1927, p. 788. — M.-L. Bagniet, « L'Art Vivant », October 1, 1927, p. 806. — Maurits Bilcke, « West-Vlaanderen », May 1958.

KAREL MAES, who was initiated to painting by Jakob Smits, was a very young artist when he was won over to *avant-garde* ideas. The works that he executed in the

years 1918-1920 are generally noteworthy for their rhythm, for their already far-reaching abstraction and the extreme stylization of the forms of nature. They developed progressively into purely abstract and vividly colored compositions. On the occasion of the visit that he paid him in 1920, Theo van Doesburg proposed a contract for him with Rosenberg in Paris. Karel Maes refused because, he said, he disliked to paint "on order". From 1920 to 1925, he participated in numerous exhibitions, and reproductions of his canvases and engravings appeared in foreign and Belgian reviews, in particular *Sept Arts*, the remarkable Brussels publication of which he was one of the editors. When he became a decorator he remained faithful to painting, but ceased to participate in any exhibitions.

In Flanders, the rebirth of wood-engraving led many young abstract painters, as we know, to linoleum printing. In this field several of them achieved remarkable results. Those of Karel Maes were by no means among the least. When we closely examine these engravings which appeared in *Sept Arts*, *Der Sturm*, *Het Overzicht*, *De Stijl*, and *Das Werk*, or those published by *De Driehoek* of Jozef Peeters, we cannot help admiring the subtle and remarkable pattern of black-and-white values, and the monumental character, the product of an apparent simplicity. The severe balance of planes, triangles, and circles alternates with the elegance of the curves. The rhythm is lively and joyous, bright and solid, the boldness matched by ingenuity.

Karel Maes's linoleum-prints, and those of some of his colleagues of the years 1920-1925, are remarkably close to the spirit of certain works of today, to those of Vasarely, among others.

The intrinsic value of the black-and-white poems of this period triumphs over the many years that have passed since. We may mention, in conclusion, that Maes likewise executed colored prints during this same period.

## SEUPHOR, MICHEL

Pseudonym of Fernand Berckelaers. Born in Antwerp on March 10, 1901, Greek and Latin classical studies in his native town. Up to the age of twenty, took an active part in the Flemish movement. 1921. Founded the « Het Overzicht » review, which was the first Belgian review to defend and propagate abstract art. Many articles by foreign contributors: Delaunay, Gleizes, Léger, Tzara, Goll, Dermée, Kassak, Moholy-Nagy, Juan Gris, Prokofiev, Lario-nov, Gontcharova, Kandinsky, Zdanevitch, Nicolas Baudouin, Huidobro, Marinetti, Russolo, Malespine, etc 1922-1924 :

Travels to Germany, Holland, Tunisia. Many visits to Paris. Met Mondrian, Delaunay, Marinetti, Cabo, Pevsner, Walden, van Doesburg, Baumeister, Léger. 1925 : Settled permanently in Paris. Met Vantongerloo in Menton. 1926-1928 : Travels to Italy, Spain, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Austria, Germany. Published « Diaphragme intérieur et un drapeau » and « Lecture élémentaire ». First meetings with Arp and Sophie Taeuber. With Paul Dermée, published « Documents internationaux de l'esprit nouveau » and organized with him the international literary evenings at the « Sacre du printemps » (1927). 1929 : First abstract works. Founded the Cercle et Carré group with Torrès-Garcia and the review of the same name.

1930 : Together with Torrès-Garcia organized the first international exhibition of abstract art at the Galerie La Boétie in Paris. Met Kandinsky. — 1932-1933 : Sojourn in Switzerland. Exhibit of unilinear drawings in Lausanne. Numerous meetings with Jacques Maritain and wrote for the review « Esprit ». — 1934-1948 : Left Paris for the Cévennes mountains, where he published autobiographical novels, poems and essays. — 1948 : Returned to Paris. — 1949 : Published « L'Art abstrait, ses origines, ses premiers maîtres », Ed. Galerie Maeght, re-issued in 1950. — 1950-1952 : Travels to the United States, England, Holland, Italy and Switzerland. « Dessins à lacunes » — 1954 : Exhibited his « Dessins à lacunes » at Berggruen's. Catalogue prefaced by Arp. Berggruen published « Mission spirituelle de l'Art ». First collage-drawings. Tapestries for the Provinciehuis in Arnhem (Holland). — 1956 : « Piet Mondrian, sa vie et son œuvre », published in Paris, New York, Cologne and Milan. — 1957 : Published, in three languages, the « Dictionnaire de la peinture abstraite », Ed. Hazan, Paris. Exhibited in Vienna with Arp and Sophie Taeuber. One-man shows in Brussels and Antwerp. — 1958 : Tapestries for the Public Instruction Office in Brussels. Exhibited with Arp and Sophie Taeuber at the Der Spiegel Gallery in Cologne. — 1959 : Published in three languages « La Sculpture de ce siècle », Ed. du Griffon, Neuchâtel, Switzerland. Exhibits at Denise René's gallery, Paris, and at the Galleria del Grattacielo, Milan. — 1960 : Exhibit in Los Angeles at the Robles Gallery. — 1961 : Exhibit in Copenhagen (Gallery Hybler). — 1962 : Exhibit in Vienna, Würthle Gallery, and again in Milan (Galleria Lorenzelli). Published « La Peinture abstraite, sa genèse, son expansion », Ed. Flammarion, in five languages. — Michel Seuphor has written numerous monographs on a great number of artists for whom he has often prefaced exhibition catalogues : Arp, Lardera, Sartoris, Penalba, Gisiger, Piñet, Macdonald-Wright, Knoop, Munari, Mortensen, Di Teana, Peire, Gorin, Tryggvadottir, Staritsky, Kleint, Alcopley, Buffie Johnson, Kassak, Nèjad, Bott, Béothy, Sophie Taeuber, Capogrossi, Brenson, Hajdu, Anthoons, Vasarely, Thépot, etc.

BIBLIOGRAPHY. Arp exhibit Catalogue at the Berggruen Gallery, 1954. — Guy de La Mothe, « Michel Seuphor, esquisse de sa vie », followed by extracts from his poetic works, Ed. à Preuilly-sur-Claise en 1942. — Francis Bernard, « Itinéraire spirituel de Michel Seuphor », Paris 1946. — Alberto Sartoris, Catalogue, Galleria Enzo Paganì exhibit, Milan 1959. — Maurits Bilcke, « Een vergeten Vlaming », *De Standaard*, December 31, 1953 ; « De Periscoop », October 1957 ; March 1961 ; « De Gazet van Antwerpen », September 18, 1957. — Marc Callewaert, « De Gazet van Antwerpen », November 12, 1957. — X., « Het activisme en de Vlaamse Frontpartij in een Franse roman », Ed. De Standaard, Antwerp, April 17, 1955. — Urbain van de Voorde, « De Standaard », September 18, 1957. — T.S., « De Standaard », October 20, 1960. — Marc Callewaert, « De Gazet van Antwerpen », May 9, 1961. — Jan d'Haese, « De Nieuwe Gids », September 16, 1961. — X., « L'Occident », May 18, 1946. — Pierre Guéguen, « XXme siècle », Paris 1954. — Bordier, « Art d'aujourd'hui », Paris 1954. — A.-M. Hamacher, « Quadrum » n° 6, Bruxelles 1959. — Carlo Belloli, préface for the Catalogue of the Galerie Lorenzelli. — H. Gisiger, « Basler Nachrichten », March 12, 1960. — J. Langs-





96.  
Michel SEUPHOR  
Drama on the Sinai, 1961  
67 x 51, collage-drawing.  
Private collection.



97.

Michel SEUPHOR  
Stand off to sea and throw the nets  
1960, 67 x 51, pen and China ink.  
Private collection.

VA AU LARGE ET JETTE TES FILETS





98.  
Michel SEUPHOR  
San Gioco Maggiore, 1956  
67 x 51, drawing-pasting.  
Private collection.

ner, « Arts and Architecture », Los Angeles 1959. — Jan Waijers, « Peinture contemporaine en Belgique », Antwerp 1961.

MICHEL SEUPHOR, shortly after the last war, made himself a worldwide reputation as an historian of abstract art. With his collaboration and that of Clayeux, the Galerie Maeght in Paris organized from April to June of 1949 an exhibition entitled *The First Masters of Abstract Art*. Subdivided into two periods — Preliminaries of Abstract Art and Flowering of Abstract Art — it enjoyed a spectacular success and led to the publication by the Galerie Maeght of a soon-famous book by Michel Seuphor, which is considered today an indispensable reference book : *Abstract Art. Its Origins. Its First Masters*. But it is not Seuphor the historian of non-figurative art who primarily concerns us here.

Seuphor's graphic work was for a long time little known, despite the fact that his work was shown as early as 1933 at an exhibition of linear drawings which he had organized at the Galerie Manassero in Lausanne, for which Alberto Sartoris had written an introductory text. He executed his first abstract canvases in 1929, the year when he wrote *Un Renouveau de la peinture en Belgique flamande*. The work was published in 1932 and illustrated with a few landscapes and portraits (Jean de Bosschère, Ensor, Permeke) whose strictly linear character was an anticipation of the abstract drawings he was to make later. Very soon Seuphor's interest in abstract art absorbed a considerable part of his activity. In the review *Het Overzicht*, founded by him and by Geert Pynenburg, the first issue of which appeared June 15, 1921, he published in that same year abstract linoleum-prints by Jozef Peeters and Edmond Van Dooren. Later came the turn of artists like Karel Maes, Prosper De Troyer, Paul Joostens, Servranckx, Jos Leonard, Félix De Boeck, Alfons Francken and H. Dubois, and also foreign artists, abstract painters and sculptors of great renown, like Kandinsky, Moholy-Nagy, Robert and Sonia Delaunay, Larionov, Gontcharova, Prampolini, Nerlinger, Fornari. The review *Het Overzicht* was thus one of the first and one of the few publications to defend and propagate abstract art.

As such, it deserves a place in the front rank of avant-garde publications of that time. It was really only about the years 1950-1952 that Seuphor devoted himself wholly to the art of drawing. When Arp saw his drawings, he immediately went to Berggruen and told him : "Seuphor draws, and he draws damned well. Go and look at his drawings, since you're a smart man, and exhibit them." Berggruen, hearing this sage advice, did

not need to be told twice. In 1954, he organized an exhibition entitled : *Michel Seuphor - Dessins à Lacunes et à Traits Horizontaux*. On this occasion he published a precious little volume, with an introduction by Arp, a postface by Seuphor himself, and many reproductions. To give an idea of the nature of these *Drawings with voids and horizontal strokes*, it seems to us useful to quote what Seuphor himself wrote on the subject : "When a writer sets himself to painting or drawing, it probably means that he has found words to be no longer sufficient, that he imagines other poetic joys than those of speech. If he then takes it into his head to comment on the plastic work, he finds himself at once in the rut of so many painters who cannot help discoursing before their canvases and belittle the work by explaining it. Even technical explanations strike me as futile. They can only be addressed to pupils. But how can a true artist have pupils, when he himself remains a pupil all his life, when he himself is never through experimenting, when he is ever coming upon new surprises ? Can technique be taught ? I consider it to be as personal as writing, and just as intangible. Good teachers make of their pupils poor counterfeiters.

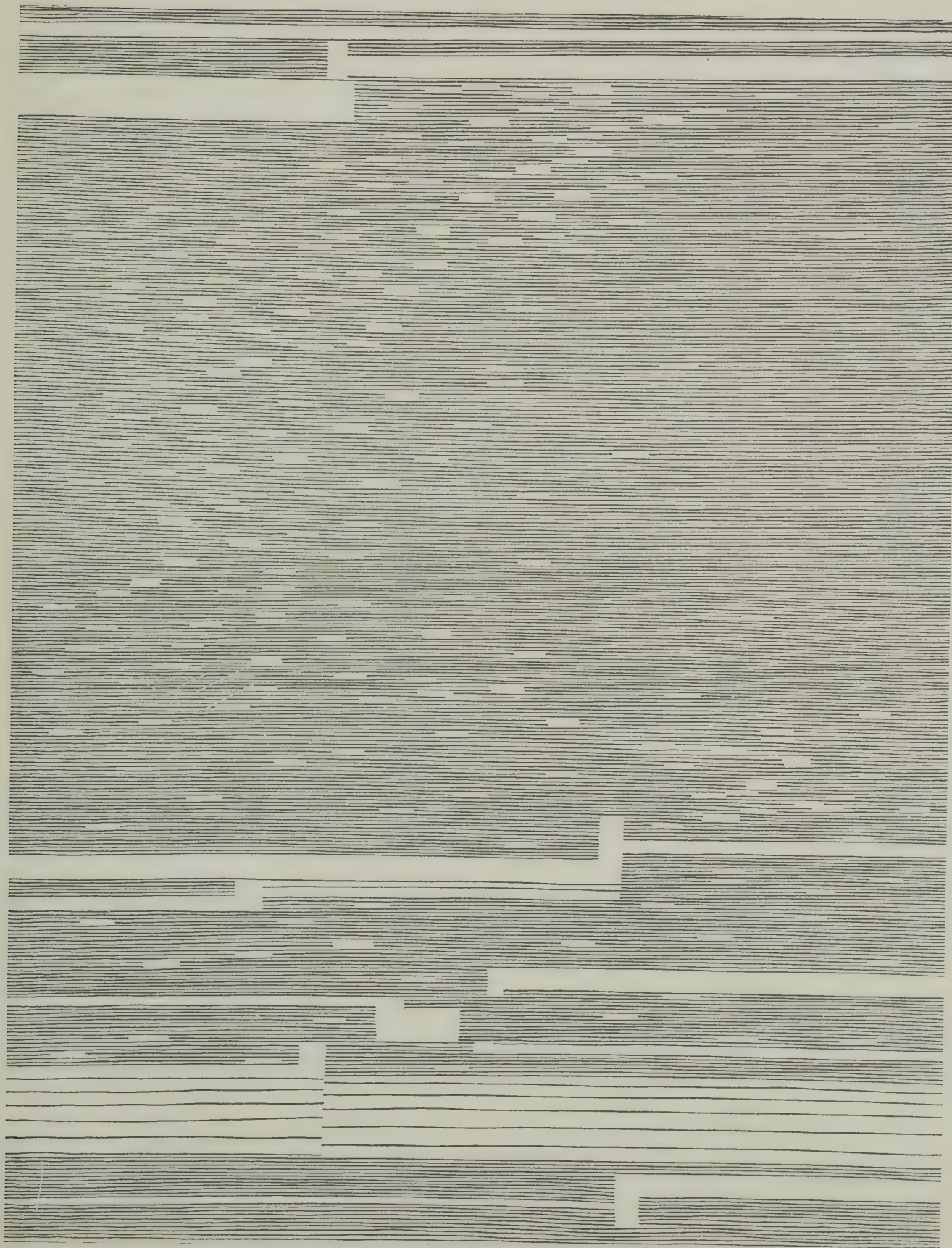
"A technique is something one discovers, which reveals itself slowly. One must have it within oneself, though this is not enough in order to have it. What is within the reach of our hand often requires long preparatory work, but no one else can help us but ourselves — and favorable circumstances. For a long time we had been walking side by side, invisible to each other; it required a certain road accident to bring us into each other's arms, united by bonds of marriage, for always. That is what technique is. A union as close, as mysterious, as full of unexpected concordances — and of discords to be avoided — as marriage. This can be no more taught than life itself.

"I draw a line, I draw another line, still another, and another yet. Between the lines something has begun to vibrate, in the white spaces forms take substance. The non-written becomes legible, the void speaks, the non-existent appears endowed with meaning. How shall I explain anything when I am myself constantly surprised ?

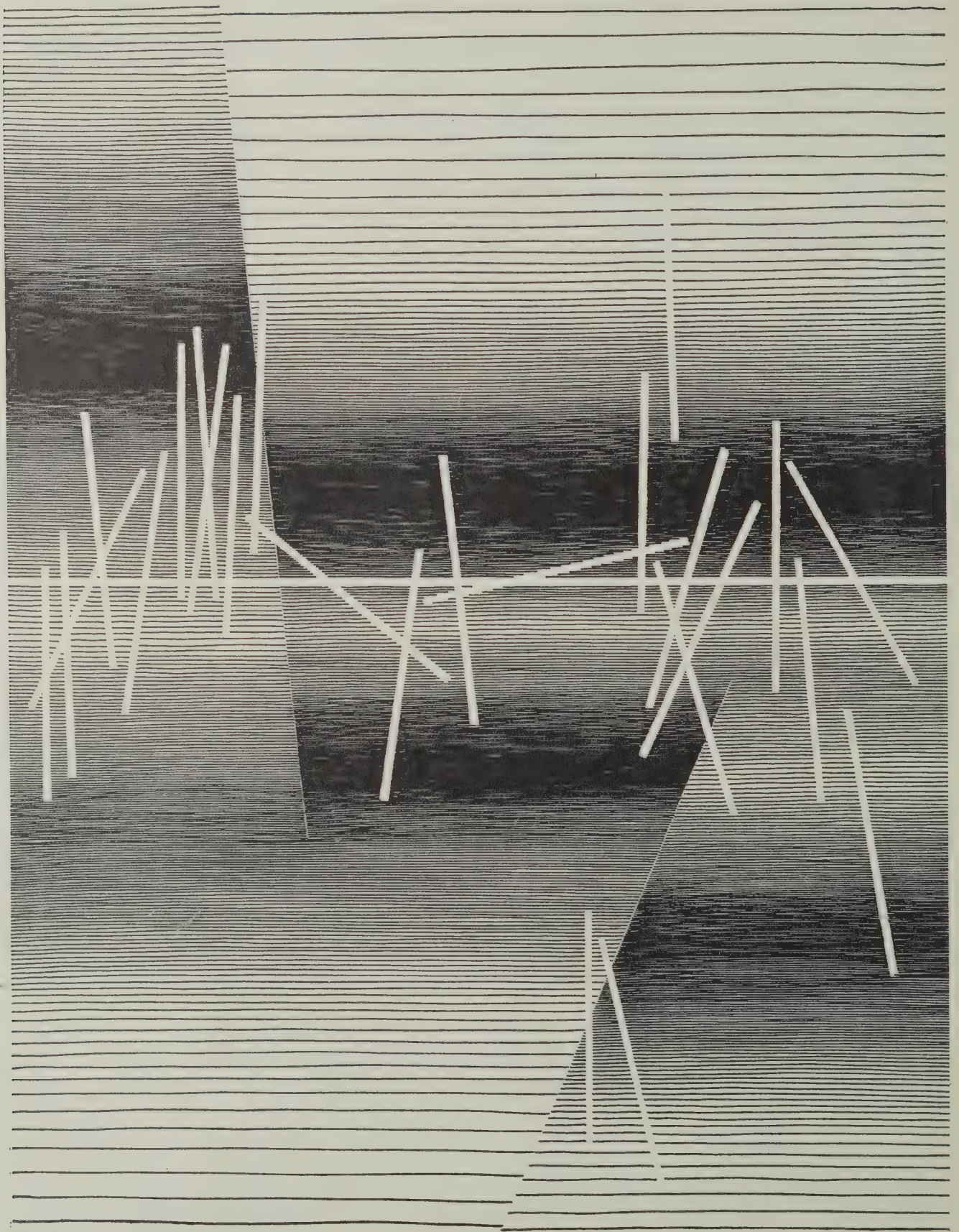
"Have you ears for a black and white song ? Have you eyes for reasonable voids ? Painting and drawing are a different language from that of words, and it too cannot be translated without betraying it."

Since the time when Seuphor set up his easel in the parks of Antwerp, he has traveled a long road, step by





99.  
Michel SEUPHOR  
Harbour in Greece, 1958  
67 x 51, pen and China ink.  
Private collection.



100.

Michel SEUPHOR  
Sticks spectacle, 1956  
67 x 51, pen and China ink.  
Private collection.



step. The intellectual firmness and the artistic constancy of Mondrian, whom he saw a great deal of from 1923 to 1933, exerted a decisive influence on him. In his gouaches we shall see Seuphor follow for a moment Mondrian's simplicity and the refinement of his neoplastic compositions. "My friendly relations with Mondrian," he says, "prevented me from doing anything else." But he immediately adds: "My admiration for his work was too great for me to continue." In an article which appeared in *Quadrum*, A.-M. Hammacher points out that one of the gouaches, just mentioned, appears in the American Glarner collection, and he emphasizes, at the same time, the parallelism between drawing and writing, two activities in which Seuphor was equally engaged during his long stay in the Cévennes. From 1934 to 1948, living right in the country, he divided his time evenly between his activities as a writer and as a drawer. A series of lithographs based on the numerous drawings (portraits, objects, and landscapes) executed during these years appeared at the Editions des Bibliophiles Alésiens in an edition limited to 30 copies, under the title *Dessins visagés*.

In 1949, Seuphor's conception of the art of drawing became considerably clarified. In a discussion with two Argentines on abstract art and its limits, he demonstrated that the extreme limitation of means specific to drawing can produce a profound richness of expression. He brought together in an album 96 drawings developing a single theme, and the following year a second album was composed under the title *Improvisations*. After the fashion of composers who, like Johann-Sebastian Bach, have written unforgettable variations on a theme, Seuphor executed dozens of variants each of which presented a different and new aspect of a given theme.

These experiments were to lead him to an increasingly severe simplification, not least in the field of techniques. Since 1950, his imagination seems to have been captured by a wide scale of innumerable horizontal and parallel lines of which the interrupted tracing forms a white void. The abstract composition grows out of this void. But it also happens that this role — the forming of the abstract composition — is reserved to the lines themselves. Or that the two processes occur in the same drawing. It should be added that the parallelism of the lines has great subtlety: it is not like the parallelism of rails, everywhere equidistant, but that drawn by the hand which lets itself be guided by its sensibility.

Certain drawings are heightened by color tints of surprising delicacy. Since 1954 Seuphor has also been

making collage-drawings which owe nothing to dadaism or to surrealism. Arp has transmuted some of Seuphor's torn drawings into enchanting collages.

In 1954, A. M. Hammacher suggested transposing Seuphor's drawings — it might be better to say his style — into an art which has always had close bonds with the art of drawing, namely tapestry. Two young Dutch weavers, Scholten and Van de Rivière, were able to solve the technical problem and the provincial administration of Arnhem gave Seuphor an order for two tapestries for the Huis der Provincie. We might also recall that some years before this, Elisabeth De Saedeleer, in her work devoted to tapestry, drew attention to the use that this eminently decorative art can make of the horizontal line. In Seuphor's drawings she at once saw designs predestined for the art of tapestry and unhesitatingly proposed that the artist execute them. Since then, her shop has executed dozens of works after Seuphor's drawings. These are works intended for the decoration of modern interiors and official buildings.

Among them may be mentioned those acquired by the Belgian government, on the advice of Emile Langui.

A word as to the technical execution: the drawings are blown up by photography to the scale of the dimensions of the tapestry or the rug. This enlargement is placed on the loom, the rugs are executed in knot-stitches, while the tapestries are woven. Unlike most modern carpets, which are pretentious and overcrowded, Seuphor's have a rare distinction. They are in harmony with the sobriety of modern architecture and provide the sometimes too severe interiors of today with a serene and poetic decoration. Their richness, curiously enough, is due to their great economy and simplicity of means as much as to their creator's inexhaustible imagination. Like Mondrian's and Capogrossi's paintings, in connection with which one is tempted to speak of a "rich poverty," Seuphor's tapestry designs, in their bareness, are an example of richness resulting from a severe simplicity. This applies also to the coloration, which is secondary and always sober.

Because of his drawings, collages, and tapestries, the author of *Les Evasions d'Olivier Trickmansholm* and of the constructively composed poems of the *Carnet Bric-à-Brac* holds an important place in the graphic art and decoration of our time. His artistic production alone would surely have won him a world-wide reputation, which his activity in favor of abstract art and his writings — we must remember his work on Mondrian, among others — have only enhanced.

## DELHEZ, VICTOR

Born in Antwerp in 1901. Studied architecture at the Academy of Fine Arts of his native town, then at the University of Louvain where he obtained a diploma as an agricultural engineer.

Abstract wood-engravings about 1922. — On close terms with Michel Seuphor, whom he visited in Paris in 1925. — Appointments as agricultural advisor at several haciendas in South America. — Professor at the Academy of Fine Arts of Mendoza, Argentina. — Travel to Europe in 1959. — Returned to abstract engraving in 1958, while at the same time continuing his figurative work.

Numerous exhibitions, almost exclusively of figurative engravings, in Belgium, Holland and in the two Americas. — Illustrated the Bible, « The Flowers of Evil », « The Brothers Karamazov » with extremely studied figurative wood-engravings.

## MESENS, EDOUARD-L.-T.

Born in Brussels in 1903. First a composer, then a poet and painter. First collages in 1924.

In 1938 director of the London Gallery. Co-founder of or contributor to the reviews « Cēsophage », « Marie », « London Bulletin », « Message from Nowhere », « Sélection » and « Variétés ».

Exhibitions in Paris, Brussels, London, Milan, etc. — Represented at the Museum of Modern Art in Brussels and in numerous collections.

Numerous painters, after the Second World War, yielded to the temptation to establish a bridge between surrealism and abstract art. Alexis Keunen, for example, undertook this in 1952, the year he won the Prix de la Jeune Peinture Belge. The rocky landscapes under an immense sky that EDOUARD-L.-T. MENSSENS painted at about this period evoke an unwonted atmosphere like that of Yves Tanguy's canvases. But their volumes approach those of non-figurative art. Menssens does not succeed in maintaining this difficult equilibrium for very long. It seems to us that the synthesis between the surrealist and the abstract tendencies in Menssens's work was most successful in his collages. These charming and clever works first presented unexpected assemblages of familiar and readily recognizable objects. Later, they were particularly striking because of their coloration. What we have here is not an abstract surrealism which disturbs or shocks the viewer, but rather a poetic and amusing exercise in colors and forms. The impression

produced is one of charm and distinction. Menssens's lively and witty imagination, his bright and gay palette, invite us to joy.

## MARSTBOOM, ANTOINE

Born in Antwerp in 1905, died May 17, 1960. From 1920 to 1935 attended the Academy and then the Advanced Institute of Fine Arts of his native city, where he successively studied sculpture and painting. Study trip to Russia in 1930.

Began to exhibit in 1936 landscapes, nudes and still lifes. — Composed stage sets for the Flemish National Theater from 1944 to 1948. — In 1950 participated in the São Paulo Biennial and was appointed professor at the Antwerp Academy of Fine Arts that same year. — Travel in the south of France in 1952 and in Italy in 1955. — Exhibited mainly in Brussels and Antwerp.

BIBLIOGRAPHY : Trouillard and Lampo, « Antoine Marstboom », Ed. Ontwikkeling, Antwerp 1952. — Aug. Corbet, Coll. Monographies de l'Art Belge, Ed. De Sikkels, Antwerp 1955. — Album of the retrospective in his honor at the Les Contemporains Gallery, Brussels 1961.

In about 1953 ANTOINE MARSTBOOM was overcome with the feeling that he had exhausted his historic apprenticeship. Indeed the canvases, gouaches, water-colors which he executed after that time are far from conforming to a description of his previous works which are marked exclusively by the characteristics of figurative transcription.

From this time on the painter began to experiment with vertical and circular rhythms coordinated by the generally black contours of the drawing and the growing affirmation of which implied a progressive reduction of natural appearances.

This change in orbit did not, however, signify a complete obliteration of such appearances from Marstboom's work. He was attached to the themes of the ports, the ships and the sailboats that he saw daily from the quays of the Scheldt not far from his house. But no one thinks of the recognizable, of the identifiable before these visual references of which only the lines of masts, the curves of the hulls and the enveloping light subsist. It is the organization of the structures, the cohesion of the pictorial planes, the orchestration of their cadences, the manner in which the color chords are molded and modeled in a broadly punctuated harmonic whole that captivate and hold the attention of the delighted spectator.



The setting forth of the plastic themes does not obey any geometric preconception, nor does Marstboom yield to the temptation of lyrical effusion. The painting is organized with firm assurance, subjected to classic disciplines of execution in which the superimposed tones, the transparencies, the glazes contribute equally to the total effect.

#### GROSEMANS, ARTHUR

Born in Brussels in 1906. A student at the Academy of Fine Arts of this city.

Has taken part in group exhibitions in Belgium since 1936. — In 1950 took his place among recruits to abstract art. — Travels in Italy (1953) and Spain (1957). — Has been a professor at the Institut des Arts et Métiers in Brussels since 1947.

After having turned to arrangements of colored geometric forms, adopted in 1959 a freer expression, using water-color and gouache.

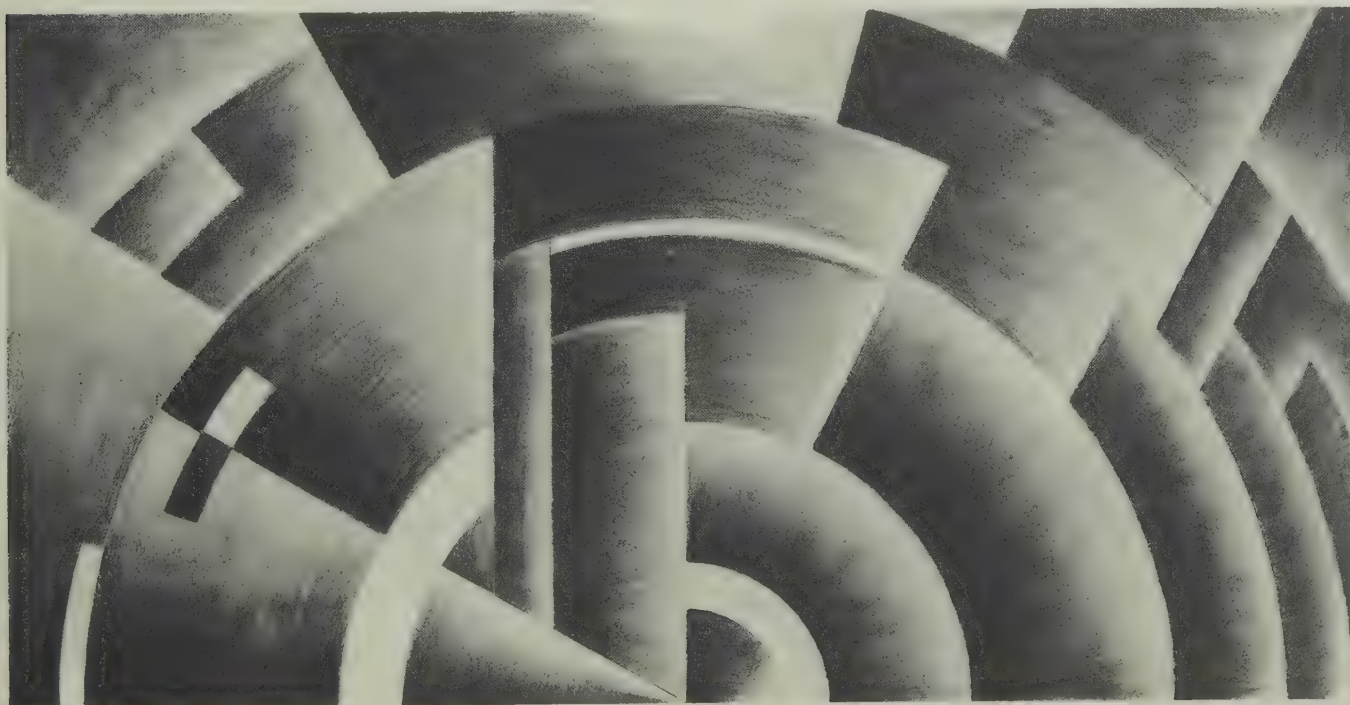
#### BILCKE, FERDINAND

Born in Hoogstraten February 21, 1906.

Abstract works (paintings, drawings and water-colors) in

1924 and 1925. — Flag designs and theater sets. — Illustrated « Langs stille wegen », poems by R.P. Joz de Clerck, Ed. Haseldonckx, Hoogstraten, 1925. — Frontispiece for « Rooode Dageraad », a play by Oscar Montrey, Ed. Sint-Alfonsus-Boekhandel, Essen, 1927. — Participated in the First Belgian Abstract Paintings exhibition, Hessehuis, Antwerp, 1959, and in exhibitions organized by the provincial government of Antwerp.

FERDINAND BILCKE at eighteen gave evidence of a precocious talent by producing a variety of water-colors which already clearly revealed a sense of rigorously constructed abstract composition. This was in 1924. The following year, but this time in his drawings, the structure loosened, and even became more poetic. At times hieratic and serene, in a pattern of surfaces gliding one over the other, at other times it would assume a more dynamic rhythm, in a pattern of disks opening fanwise. The quality of these works makes one regret that Ferdinand Bilcke ceased to devote himself to independent artistic work. His sense of abstract form nevertheless continued to manifest itself effectively in his art of composing a text, in his illustrations, in his designs for carpets and flags. During the period referred to above, he also executed a few sculptures in wood, neo-plastic in style, in the spirit of Georges Vantongerloo's *Interrelations of masses*.





102.  
Antoine MARSTBOOM  
Harbourar Impressions, 1958  
43 x 70, oil on linen.  
The artist collection.

## MILO, JEAN

Born in Saint-Josse-ten-Noode May 15, 1906. Pseudonym of Emile van Gindertael and brother of Roger van Gindertael, the art critic living in Paris. Studied at the Academies of Saint-Josse and Brussels.

From 1926 to 1931 he was assistant director of the Le Centaure Gallery in Brussels. — Later on he was a reporter on the « Indépendance Belge » and a correspondent for the review « Les Beaux-Arts » of Paris. — Member of La Jeune Peinture Belge and of Réalités Nouvelles. — In 1950, cofounder of the Art Abstrait group. — Many exhibition in Europe and in the United States. — Canvases in the Brussels Museum of Modern Art and in numerous collections. — Likewise known as a poet and novelist.

BIBLIOGRAPHY : Paul Pochet, « Jean Milo », Ed. L'Art et la vie, Brussels 1938. — Paul Haesaerts, « Jean Milo », Ed. Apollo, Brussels 1943. — Roger van Gindertael, « Jean

Milo », Ed. Signes, Paris 1953. — Luc Haesaerts, « Jean Milo », Coll. Monographies de l'Art Belge, Ed. De Sikkel, Antwerp 1954.

Since his first one-man show in 1924 — he was eighteen at the time ! — it is to be noted that JEAN MILO has participated in all the young painting movements with the exception of surrealism. He first joined the post-expressionist current, composed non-figurative drawings between 1926 and 1928, later returned to nature interpreted with the tenderness of the animists, then with the restrained fieriness of the members of La Jeune Peinture Belge. Finally he proved to be one of the first neo-abstract painters of the second post-war period.





103.  
 Jean MILO  
 Sawa, 1954, 50 x 50, oil on linen.  
 Kurt Lewy collection, Brussels.





104.  
 Anna STARITSKY  
 Embryonic nature, 1962  
 89 x 145, oil on linen.  
 Private collection.

In these successive metamorphoses of style, he never lost the innate freshness of his vision nor the vividness of his colors, qualities which are outstanding in his abstract canvases. Milo prefers vivid, sparkling tints that evoke springtime. One day he told his brother, Roger : "I should like to be able to paint the spring without representing it." He continues to show preference for fresh colors, in which pinks and tender greens predominate. At times, in his latest work, there is a suggestion of the technique of Pierre Alechinsky, to whose exuberant personality he has certainly reacted enthusiastically. The *Small-format Work* from the Kurt Lewy collection reproduced here is dated 1954. It is a composition of planes which, while they are not geometrically

dominant, nevertheless imprison the light. But here too the color is particularly fresh, luminous, and the canvas moves us by its delicacy and by its almost exotic poetry.

#### VELLE, MARTHE

Born in 1907 in Ostend. Practiced sculpture, from 1928, then painting. Her studio having been destroyed in the bombardments of 1940, she settled in Brussels the following year. Learned engraving in 1950 from H. Kerels, then studied the techniques of metal and enamel at the Ecole Nationale Supérieure d'Architecture et d'Art Décoratif (E.N.S.A.A.D.).

Has participated in numerous exhibitions devoted to graphic and applied arts.



Since 1954, MARTHE VELLE has discovered in abstraction a new awareness of her personality and of her creative possibilities. Her growth was very rapid through a variety of techniques to which she applied herself passionately, without attaching herself to the superficial satisfactions of skill. Recently she has found in the unctuous substance of encaustic a malleable process, adapted to her perceptive apprehension of forms and colors, whose unreal efflorescences testify to an acute sense of presence in our period. The interest that she shows in etching, in enamel and in iron, further reveals the conviction with which she identifies experiments and triumphs of craftsmanship with life's effusions.

## EEMANS, MARC

Born in Malines, June 16, 1907. Studied at the Academies of Fine Arts of Molenbeek-Saint-Jean and of Brussels. First abstract works in 1922. Participated at that time in the Le Triangle and Sept Arts groups.

Contributed to a group exhibition in Monza in 1925. — Passed over to surrealism in 1926-1927. — Co-founder in 1933 of the review « Hermès ». — After the Second World War, co-founder of the Centre International de l'Actualité Fantastique et Magique. — Is at present the editorial secretary of the review « Fantasmagie ».

Printer, draftsman, mystical prose writer and art critic, MARC EEMANS, a versatile but uneven artist, was in 1922 or thereabout the youngest abstractionist in his country. He executed at this time meticulously worked-out compositions whose subdued coloration and serenely rounded volumes produced a strange and unwonted sensation. His canvases already expressed something of the mystery that he would later suggest in his surrealist works. Magic (white and black) has consistently attracted this great specialist in esoteric literature. Marc Eemans finally abandoned abstract painting about 1926. He had come to consider it "an outmoded position and an aesthetico-materialistic aberration of modern art".

## SCHELCK, MAURICE

Born in Alost in 1907. Studied at the Alost and Brussels Academies. Rome and Paris.

Exhibited at Alost, Ghent, Brussels, Amsterdam, Munster, Paris and London. — After a withdrawal of twenty years, exhibited figurative works at the Galerie les Contemporains in Brussels in 1955. — Exhibited in January 1959 at the Palais des Beaux-Arts in Brussels. — 1960 : An exhibit in March at the Galerie Ptah in Brussels. — 1961 : Abandoned abstract painting.

BIBLIOGRAPHY : Maurits Bilcke, « De Gazet van Antwerpen », March 23, 1955 ; January 28, 1959 ; March 30, 1960 ; Preface to the Ptah exhibit, Brussels, March 1960.

## STARITSKY, ANNA

Born in Poltava (Russia) in 1908. Was initiated to drawing and music in Moscow. Sojourned in Paris in 1926. Subsequently resided in Sofia and there attended the School of Fine Arts. Settled in 1931 in Brussels, where she briefly attended courses in graphic art at the Ecole Nationale Supérieure d'Architecture et d'Art Décoratif (E.N.S.A.A.D.). Married the Belgian painter Orix (see this name) in 1946, lived for some years in Nice where she gradually turned to abstraction, and then settled in Paris. Frequent stays in Belgium.

Numerous individual exhibitions and participations in group exhibitions in Belgium since 1946, in France, in the Netherlands, in Italy, in Switzerland and in Germany. Also practices etching and has been published, since 1959, by Lacourrière in Paris.

BIBLIOGRAPHY : Hertha Wescher (Schettini, Milan, 1957). — Hertha Wescher « Cimaïses », No. 4, 1958. — P. Restany « I 4 Soli », Turin 1957.

The evolution in the direction of abstraction was dictated, in ANNA STARITSKY's case, not by any exigency of a formal nature, but by an intuitive need to expand the means of pictorial expression, including its occasional adjuvants — incorporated fabrics, cardboard or paper. The luxuriant nature of the Côte d'Azur where she lived some fifteen years ago revealed to her in the raw — the configuration of rocks, roots, bark, fossils — elements which led her to evolve from the dialectics of representation to the abstract approach, envisaged as a transfiguration of the perspective and visual data of the concrete.

Technique, in her case, is constantly linked to the resonances of the sensibility and to the faculties of the improvising imagination. No defined forms, but movements of forms; not fixed lines circumscribing contours but great moving signs enveloped in warm modulations of the paint. She seeks the frank, vibrant, sensitive spot, brushed in long irregular touches modeled in superimposed layers, in which the vividness and the evanescence of the vital flux have their repercussions in a generally ascending movement.

Staritsky's recent works, which have become a synthesis of water, earth and bark, express energy as much as they do mobility, the sensitiveness of the tactile thrill as much as that of the gesture that carries energy and communicates it to the jerky eddies of the tonal orchestration. Their morphology is defined in tormented waves and trajectories which harmonize with one another, without calculation, in full swing, enriched by



105.

Jules LISMONDE  
Argegno, 1962, 92 x 65, drawing.  
The artist collection.

the impetus that carries them along. An instinctive control ensures their cohesion, directs their inner action and their sensorial animation.

#### LISMONDE, JULES

Born in Brussels in 1908, of a father of Walloon origin and a mother of Flemish stock. Studied at the Academies of Brussels (1924) and of Saint-Josse (1934).

Exhibited paintings and drawings as early as 1930, then devoted himself exclusively to charcoal (1943). — A member of the Jeune Peinture Belge group (1946) with

which he exhibited at The Hague, Amsterdam and Zurich. — Regular sojourns in Holland, Italy and France. — Travels to Switzerland and Greece. — One-man shows in Belgium and other countries. — Participates in most of the outstanding art events in Belgium and abroad. — Won the Renato Carain Prize (Venice Biennial 1958) and the Best Foreign Draftsman Prize (São Paulo Biennial 1959). — Is represented in the Belgian museums, at the Stedelijk Museum of Amsterdam, at the Musée National d'Art Moderne of Paris as well as in numerous private collections. — A monumental panel in iron and glass slabs at the Institute of Zoology of the University of Liège (1959). — Executed a number of lithographs in Paris in 1960.

BIBLIOGRAPHY : Louis Lebeer, Coll. Monographies de l'Art Belge, Ed. Elsevier, Brussels, 1956. — J.-K. Geirlandt, « Het 5de Wiel », Ghent, No. 4, November-December, 1961. —





106.  
Jules LISMONDE  
Comacina 1, 1961  
100 x 65, charcoal-drawing.  
Private collection.

Lismonde 61

Throughout his career we find the confirmation of Louis Lebeer's observation : "JULES LISMONDE is one of the few artists who have been wholly fascinated by drawing. Considering the fact, moreover, that he practices this technique exclusively — purely — in black and white, it would be difficult to find his equal in Belgium." But, we must at once add, these drawings with their warm flecked modulations can be regarded as those of a painter anxious to enclose the abstraction of color in the dignities of black and white. *Royal as purple*, Mallarmé used to say, speaking of Redon's deep and velvety blacks. A similar sense of equivalence solicits us before the counterpoints of opaque areas and bright spaces which, in Lismonde's drawings, take on the tonalities, the vibrations and the lights of the palette. In 1950 his work showed signs of a mutation which was to manifest itself first in a variety of attempts to juggle with the data of visible reality before it progressively acquired the attributes of autonomy, and finally of independence. A long practice of landscape and portrait drawing had enabled him to assimilate the refinements of technique and to handle them with dexterity. An evolution can be discerned and if we mention it, it is simply in order to note the same balancing between the freedom and the rigor, the spontaneity and the reflection, the fluidity and the density that we discover in the interwoven scintillations of his great abstract charcoals of today.

The change of direction could be called a phenomenon of osmosis. When Lismonde committed himself to it, he had seen a sufficient number of painters abandoning traditional positions to wonder along what path he in turn might proceed in order to break new ground. Very conscientiously he sought a new equilibrium in the structure of the composition itself. In this connection the combined influences of Seurat and of Jacques Villon have often been invoked. They probably helped him to find a basis for a new approach. Enveloping the data of the concrete in an architecture of partitioned planes and of diagrams in perspective whose overlappings and intersections he tended to emphasize, he modeled the piled-up order of these planes and the combinations of these diagrams into a *pointilliste* network brought to various intensities which, while determining the distribution of the space, served at the same time as support for judiciously planned graphic movements. The drawing now no longer aimed to reproduce, to describe an outer spectacle, but tended, on the contrary,

to crystallize the vision in a constructive network in which the interest was concentrated on the plastic suggestions.

At a later stage, we find the planes vacillating, falling apart. Their contours and their shadows interpenetrate or become dissociated. The surface is broken by the undisciplined proliferation of oblique hatchings which are multi-directional and amplify the tormented cadence of the whole. On this jostled (though far from chaotic) groundwork an array of shaded dots, scumbles and delicately spread-out lines are concentrated, piled up or scattered in multiple combinations. A whole intelligent and sensitive stratification, composed of shades subtleties, of quick accents and encompassing waves, constitutes the main object of the work, barely revealing the faint membrane of the motif.

Could a more subtly plotted itinerary be imagined for the progress of the mind and the labor of the unconscious toward abstraction ? The moment Lismonde eliminated contours and abandoned limitative positions, free interpretation triumphed. By 1959 the paper became covered with stipplings whose indefinite sweeps, like the imprint of raindrops on steam-clouded windows, communicated the resonances of an inner animation which obeyed a secret logic. The arrangement of the concrete henceforth gave way to spurts, contrasts, jerky flights, gyrations whose distribution nevertheless kept the rhythms of life, their flexibility and their animation. In this invented space the inflections of the black and the white find the ideal field for their evolutions, and their cadences adapt themselves altogether naturally to the artist's intimate inspiration. In full possession of his means, Lismonde has found in this style the measure of inner sensibility and the difficult accommodation of matter and spirituality.

A series of India ink drawings testify to the fact that in 1960 he felt the temptation to explore — by way of a diversion — the possibilities of calligraphy. While this was a marginal experiment, it gave him an increased assurance in his sense of freedom. It is this sense of freedom that manifests itself in the admirable drawings of recent years in which the guiding stipple work is transformed into a succession of long irregular and tenuous hatchings, magnetized by the oblique and dominated by the alternation of strong and light tones and radiant voids. As though suspended to the whiteness of the paper, these hatchings in turn convey the art of slow and meditated flowering, with its delicacy and its controlled strength, to which Lismonde's deep leanings are linked.



## QUINET, MIG

Born in Charleroi in 1908. She studied drawing in the Brussels Academy of Fine Arts. Self-taught as a painter.

First single-artist show in 1938. — A member of the Jeune Peinture Belge group, with which she exhibited abroad from 1945 to 1948. — Figurative works until 1952. — Has exhibited several times at the Brussels Palace of Fine Arts.

By virtue of the means of interpretation — we might even say, the inner transfiguration — to which MIG QUINET has had recourse for the past ten years, she belongs in the lineage of painters who aim, through the transpositions they have chosen for themselves, to evoke a *parallel harmony*, whose imprecision results from a sense of imaginative appropriation as much as from a new manifestation of the sensibility. The perceptions of landscape, of gardens, of flowers bursting into bloom, constantly recur in her allusive evocations, treated in smart, spontaneously applied hues. The alacrity of her palette communicates an agreeable and even joyous demeanor to the modest level of her talent.

## MORTIER, ANTOINE

Born in Brussels in 1908. A sculptor-ornamenter since the age of 15. Then for two years attended the Academies of Saint-Josse and of Saint-Gilles near Brussels.

Attracted to painting about 1937, participated in 1944 in the Apport exhibition and in 1946 held his first one-man show. This was followed by many others. — A member of the Jeune Peinture Belge group, soon participated in many international contemporary art events : The São Paulo (1953 and 1961) and Venice (1960) Biennials ; the triennial exhibition of the Carnegie Institute in Pittsburg (1952, 1955, 1961) ; Young European Painters exhibition New York, 1954) ; International Art exhibition (Japan, 1959), etc. — Selected in 1956 among the Belgian candidates for the International Guggenheim Prize. — Numerous drawings between 1957 and 1960. — Works in several foreign museums (Albright Art Gallery of Buffalo and Solomon E. Guggenheim, New York ; Municipal Museum of The Hague ; National Museum of Modern Art, Paris, etc.) and in several well-known Belgian collections. — Has sojourned in France, Italy and Spain.

BIBLIOGRAPHY : Paul Fierens, Coll. Monographies de l'Art Belge, Ed. Elsevier, Brussels, 1956. — René de Solier, « Quadrum », Brussels, No. 9/1960, pp. 107-114.

The arresting canvases by ANTOINE MORTIER displayed on these pages are offshoots of the aftermath of Flemish expressionism. The vigor with which this artist emphasizes the material character of the color, accentuates the inner animation, exalts its massive sensuality, belongs

to a special emotional state to which Permeke, De Smet, Brusselmans are by no means strangers, but which he commands with an ample and personal ease, at a far remove from formalities and stereotypes.

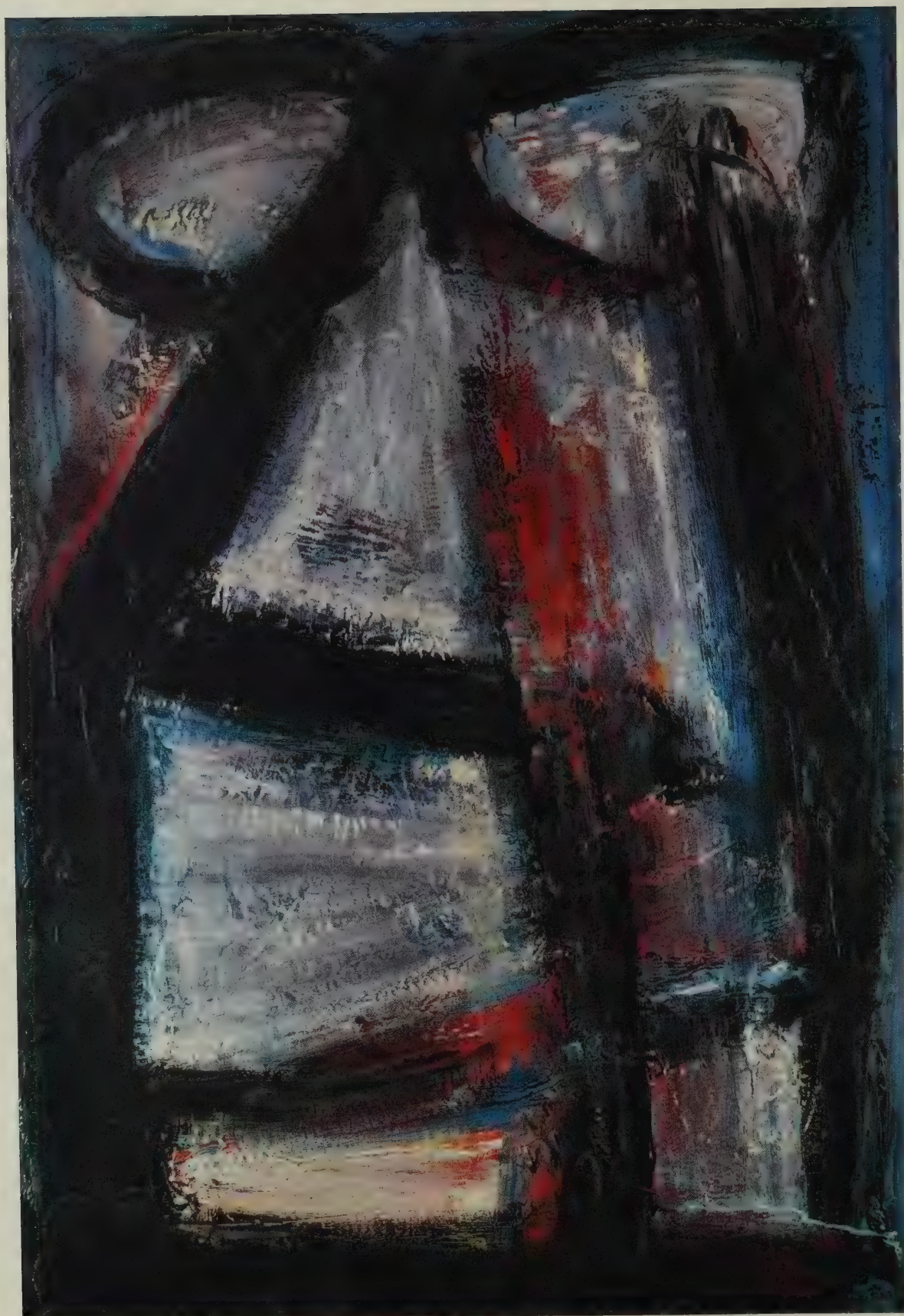
His approach to painting is in fact quite different. The objective contents of the subject having been done away with, the painting becomes a concentration of intense life as a result of the redoubtable totality of the sign. The gesture that shapes it appears as the propeller of the plastic system. The space that surrounds it, built in turn with broad impetuous touches, continues its manifestation and amplifies it by its superabundant energy. This pictorial diagram appears all the more robust as it is not left to the gratuity of impulse, but is, on the contrary, experienced and ripened in the affective release. Its capacity for enveloping the framework of the composition in the thickness of the color and thus incorporating itself in a context revealing a determined presence is an integral part of the subjectivity of the artist and his psychological behavior.

Like most of the young painters who came to art immediately after the last war, Mortier first took his bearings on the humble verism of familiar reality. Before any attempt at transposition, faces and objects insistently occur in his repertory. But already is his first exhibition, in January 1946, the fundamental coordinates of his future work can be discerned : the expressive density of the paint, the hardening of the contours, the bold elisions, the marked accentuation of the features of the motif.

From the outset, the outline imposed itself like a kind of physical tension and its affirmation was exalted in the brilliant compactness of black. Gradually it acquired an autonomous value, became imbued with dramatic feeling and assumed the aspect of amplifying diagrams in which the artist's inner combativeness can be recognized. If Mortier, in 1947, felt the temptation of rigor, this temptation was of short duration, the time he needed to understand that his register of exuberance and vehemence could not tolerate such an ascendancy.

At no time is the abstract dissociated from the primordial perception of the concrete. But there is a great distance between the arguments of the image and the diagram that synthetizes and transcends them. The fact is that Mortier studied for a long time the data of the initial pretext in order to make them yield what lay beyond their representative function. Few painters, in fact, are so thoroughly masters of their sketches. In the case of Mortier, the operations of synthesis which precede the abstracting process are manifest in the draw-





107  
Antoine MORTIER  
The coxwains, 1959  
130 x 90  
oil on linen.  
Private collection





108.  
Antoine MORTIER  
The shock, 1954, 148 x 80, oil on linen  
Private collection.





109.  
Antoine MORTIER  
The heights, 1959  
207 x 275, oil on linen.  
Private collection.

ing. He first makes a sketch with pen, charcoal, pencil or wash, which he does over in successive versions, in order to abbreviate and transform its structure until he senses in it the essential element. These *variations*, on nudes, people or objects are significant in revealing the inner genesis. A whole slow transforming progression

can thus be discerned in the questioning of a form in search of its final manifestness.

How far such works are from painting for pure enjoyment ! The evolution that has taken place, since 1950, on the international level, gives them a precise, a wider and in a sense a premonitory meaning for us. But few



were those who had perceived or sensed this position at the time. Rarer still were those who had imagined that Mortier would eventually be found to come close to what such painters as Schneider, Soulages, Still, Kline or Motherwell have become. Not as a satellite, as is sometimes insinuated on the basis of uncontrolled analogies, but as a direct partner and a close family member.

To be sure, such personalities, favored by renown, readily serve as points of reference for notions which have had a considerable vogue among us. But can they on this account arrogate to themselves the monopoly of priority? As early as 1949, Mortier tackled large-format surfaces, which were not much practiced at the time. His painting expanded in the form of peremptory strokes and fiery colors. One need only go back to his monumental drawings of 1951 brushed in spots and spurts of ink, in which the weight of the line becomes one with the rudimentary movement of the form. How many people sensed the audacity of this ample paroxysmal style, swept by a gust of bitterness and indignation? Lyrical abstraction had scarcely been heard of, and *action painting*, which was propagated by the new American painting, was practically unknown during this period.

Mortier at that time, in Belgium, constituted a world unto himself, which those around him feigned not to be aware of. A fanatical iconoclast, the figuratives said. But he was hardly better received by the others, who regarded this violence as a manifestation of anarchy. Essentially, it was the difficulty of relating him to artists already accepted by public opinion that caused his works to be confused with those of some problematical first comer on whom it seemed dangerous to place bets. Mortier therefore had to fight against an environment which by its crushing lack of comprehension obstinately blocked the path of development to which he was committed. This ostracism may have helped to provoke the tendency to excess which gives his paintings their offensive power. Would they have such energetic resonance and authenticity if they had not been stimulated by some inner revolt?

Mortier edifies a brutal, violent work, lifted up by an elementary power which often achieves a monumental vision. It is quite clear that the artist owes his effectiveness, not to a presiding intellect but to the inner upheavals of instinct. His abrupt patches and broad spreads of paint, his rough lines and indignant impastos are eloquently expressive of his reflexes of contempt and his bursts of vehemence.

But it must be realized that in revealing this fundamental anguish, Mortier seeks equally to reveal the prerogatives and the generousities of painting. It has perhaps not been sufficiently observed how subtly his violences are conveyed. The paint is shot through with unctuous gleams and incandescent flashes whose visual texture corresponds to the enriching values of the plastic drama. Paul Fierens rightly emphasizes "the vigorous, velvety, savory tones" as well as "the delicate iridescences" that intensify the radiance of the paint quality.

In committing his anxieties and his torments, his outbursts of sensibility and of conscience to canvas, Mortier fills the realm of abstraction with a burning presence, and many are those who, like Hugo Claus, Vandercam, Van Anderlecht, Drybergh, have undergone his influence without the benefit, however, of a comparable boldness of spirit.

## BONNET, ANNE

Born in Brussels in 1908, by the name of Anne Thonet, of parents from the Liège region. Orphaned at a very early age, had a difficult life until her marriage (1930). Early attracted by drawing, briefly attended the decorative section of the Brussels Academy of Fine Arts, then began to paint at the Saint-Josse Academy (1936-1938). Succumbed November 14, 1960, to a cancer ailment which had tortured her for nearly three years.

In 1939, with G. Bertrand and L. Van Lint, founded the ephemeral circle *La Route Libre* where she showed her first paintings. — Participated regularly, during the war years, in the Apport Salons, then in 1945 helped to found the *Jeune Peinture Belge* association, whose group exhibitions she accompanied to Paris, The Hague, Amsterdam, Stockholm, Zurich and Oxford. — Sojourns in the south of France (1935, 1937, 1946, 1949, 1952, 1955) and in Brittany (1947 and 1957). — Travels to Italy (1948 and 1956), Spain and Morocco (1950), Switzerland and Austria (1951 and 1954), Greece, Turkey and Yugoslavia (1952). — Represented in important group exhibitions: Venice Biennial (1948 and 1956), São Paulo Biennial (1954), Cassel's « Documenta II » (1959) in particular. — Single-artist shows in Brussels in 1941, as well as in Paris (1954) and Berlin (1955). — Is represented in several museums (Brussels, Antwerp, Liège, Verviers, The Hague, Aix-la-Chapelle) and private collections.

BIBLIOGRAPHY : Jan Walravens, *Bulletin des Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts*, Brussels, 1953 (pp. 169-175). — Paul Davay, *Coll. Monographies de l'Art Belge*, Ed. De Sikkels, Antwerp, 1954.

In the work of ANNE BONNET we can trace the preoccupations shared by the best Belgian painters of her generation who had begun their careers during the decline of expressionism and the expansion of sur-



110.  
Anne BONNET  
Totem, 1953, 118 x 89, oil on linen.  
Private collection.



realism, and who had first sought their direction in a discreet intimist figurative art before discovering a source of renewal, if not of accomplishment, in the abstract transmutation of the data of reality.

Anne Bonnet's first subjects as a painter were corners of rooms, and suburban scenes, portraits of children and young girls, which she painted in a subdued key. Their sentimental content testified to an ingenuous tenderness, receptive to the influence of Evenepoel and Edgard Tytgat. Her evolution away from this began in 1947, as a result of contacts she had made in Brussels, through the Apollo Gallery, with certain representatives of the young Paris school. She gradually turned away from the direct representation of beings and things. Her graphic structures grew firmer, her palette bright-

ened, and the chromatic movements became enriched by delicate vibrations to communicate more subtly the inflections of her pictorial sensibility. Thus she progressed, by slow transitions, in the direction of more and more synthetic evocations which were soon to lead her to a non-figurative approach.

This phase, which began in 1950, became definite by 1952, at the end of a crisis of uncertainty. Struck by the example of Bazaine, Estève, Manessier, whose efforts tended to the plastic transfiguration of the visible and perceptible — which had influenced Van Lint and Bertrand in a parallel way — she looked to this principle, new to her, to stimulate the development of her art. There resulted a rich production of allusive diagrams — inspired mostly by travel reminiscences —



111.  
Anne BONNET  
Barbarian signs, 1959  
90 x 116, oil on linen.  
Private collection.





112.  
Rudolf MEERBERGEN  
The tranquil machine, 1962  
149 x 90, oil on linen.  
The artist collection.



the arrangement of whose tonalities, lines and rhythms capture, through the subjective recomposition, the secret identity of the initial pretext.

This is what can be deduced from a canvas like *Totem* (1953) in which we can see how the notations of the sensibility and of the imagination join in an ordering of forms freely disposed, in which the perceptions of the *inner* eye are projected in the stature and the articulations of the composition. The aerial mirage of the *Sacre Oriental* (1955), on the other hand, expressed discreetly the intimacy with nature that the artist always maintained in her flight into the abstract: the magic of the mystical and sunbathed regions of Islam is diffused throughout in a crystallization of refined colors, without its being possible to identify any immediate references. These are examples among many others, whose fundamental meaning lies in a similar interpenetration of intuitively selected optical impressions and of emotional impulses slowly interiorized which communicate to the viewer a happy shock of surprise. When she entitles a painting *Ville Blanche*, *Chant d'Espagne*, *Héliantes*, *Cimetière Marin* or *Ville d'Or*, what we are given is suggestive equivalences and plastic correspondences which are intimately associated with the personal grasp of the subject.

Wary of haste as much as of virtuosity and spectacular innovations, self-demanding to the point of periodically destroying the paintings that no longer satisfied her, she constantly exercised a sense of measure and insight, and her execution was reflective and fervently meditated. Temperamentally opposed to strict, cerebral disciplines, but equally rebellious to the turbulent dictates of impulsiveness, she chose to explore the resources of her talent with a reserved animation, which she translated in calmly distributed combinations of contrasted high-lights, of delicate tints, of soft shades and shimmering transparencies.

In 1958, the artist came down with the first symptoms of the disease to which she was to succumb two years later. Withdrawn from artistic life henceforth, in moments of respite she executed many gouaches and a few paintings which testify to her premonitions. Dark patterns of color envelop obsessive signs engendered by the phantasms that haunt her inner vision. In *Formes* (1959), in which the colors are swallowed up by twilight tonalities that suggest the ochred austerity of Flemish expressionism, the eye is made suddenly captive by the anguish that haunted her. Her tormented imagination even led her, in large-format paintings, to evoke imaginary landscapes of deadlands and rocky

expanses, in which the urge to paint that came through so clearly when she was at the height of her creative powers has turned into a tired rambling along a road haunted by phantasms.

## MEERBERGEN, RUDOLF

Born in Antwerp July 19, 1908. Secondary schooling in Amsterdam. Studied at the Academy and at the Advanced Institute of Fine Arts of his native city. Painter and color expert.

Represented in the Museums of Brussels and Ghent, as well as in several Belgian collections.

After a long figurative period, RUDOLF MEERBERGEN turned to abstract painting in about 1952. This evolution, which led to the disappearance of the reproduction of nature, in no way modified the artist's palette. As an abstract painter Meerbergen remained faithful to light browns, to pinks, to off-whites and bright greens. He continued to spread his colors in the same way. The paint quality is gritty on the abstract canvases as on the figurative canvases. The sharply outlined volumes fit into one another like wheels, and stand out clearly, because of their strong coloration, against the neutral background.

Later, fragments of disks, circles, elongated surfaces, whose form was never perfectly geometrical but whose outlines were always sharp, strangely suggested planets and celestial bodies. The canvas became metamorphosed into an abstract sky from which a cosmic feeling emanated.

Feeling is always preponderant in Meerbergen's art. What is most appealing about it is the relations between the delicate tints, which have a musical delicacy. Their poetic quality is reminiscent of oriental art. The same could in fact be said of the evocative role played by the sign in Meerbergen's work. Underlying his art is an esoteric substratum which is revealed by his strange coloration and his eloquent brush work. And it is perhaps in this that his special charm lies.

## DE COCKER, HENRI

Born in Vurste, near Ghent, September 15, 1908. Since the age of 13 he worked as a seasonal worker, in the brick factories of the suburbs of Brussels in summer and in winter in the sugar factories of the north of France.





113.  
Jan COBBAERT  
White ores, 1962  
100 x 80, oil on linen.  
Private collection.



1934-1945 : Ghent Academy. 1949 : Institut supérieur in Antwerp. His bicycle trips took him as far as Narvik, Rome, Seville, Vienna and Zagreb. 1950 : Stay in Paris.

1942 and 1943 : Single-artist shows at the Galerie Pan in Ghent. — 1946 and 1952 : The same at the Galerie Vyncke-Van Eyck in Ghent. — 1958 : Exhibited with Haeck and Cousy at the Elmar Gallery in Ghent, and at the Celbeton Gallery in Termonde. — 1960 : Single-artist shows at the Galerie Le Zodiaque in Brussels and the V.T.B. Studio in Ghent.

BIBLIOGRAPHY : A. Schautteet, Introduction to the exhibition, Le Zodiaque Gallery, Brussels, 1960. — Maurits Bilcke, « De Gazet van Antwerpen », October 19, 1960.

**HENRI DE COCKER** belongs to the category of artists who work in silence and isolation. Yet his single exhibition (Brussels, Le Zodiaque Gallery, 1960) aroused the interest of critics. The show contained an exciting series of tachiste canvases which, in spite of their lyricism, showed great delicacy of feeling and perfect self-mastery. A few surfaces, vague forms, nervously grouped lines, a discreet range of color in the background on which a certain counterpoint stands out. One is struck as by a poetic landscape perceived for the first time. Add to this an ever-so-slightly Japanese atmosphere and an economy in means of expression, or rather, in means of suggestion.

This last characteristic is to be found also in the work of another solitary painter, too little known : Rigobert Haeck. In his case, as with Henri De Cocker, withdrawal has determined the originality of expression.

## MELS, RENE

Pseudonym of René Meulemans, born in Hérent-lez-Louvain in 1909. Attended the Academy of Fine Arts of Brussels, then the Ecole Nationale Supérieure d'Architecture et des Arts Décoratifs (E.N.S.A.A.D.). A member of the Jeune Peinture Belge group in 1947. Many sojourns in France.

Practices etching and ceramics. — Has also done stained-glass windows and decorative work incorporated into architecture. — Has very rarely exhibited his works.

Working in deliberate retirement, with a wisdom derived from a need for faith, **RENE MELS** has, since 1947, experienced the temptation of the abstract which he considers to be the supreme instrument of poetic metamorphosis. His works, highly varied and always characterized by a fine freshness of accomplishment, testify to the pleasure he feels in conceiving and executing

them. The non-imaged reminiscences of nature that can often be discerned in them heighten the message communicated to the senses. A restrained fervor, an intimately vivid charm emanate from the colored values whose register the artist diversifies with a scrupulous and delicate firmness.

## COBBAERT, JAN

Born in 1909 in Heverlee, near Louvain. A student at the Brussels Academy of Fine Arts, after a course at the Louvain Academy where he became a professor in 1944. A founding member of the Jeune Peinture Belge group. For some years has practiced silk-screen printing, wrought-iron work and ceramics as well as painting.

Numerous one-man shows since 1942 and frequent participation in group shows, in Belgium and other countries (Fifth São Paulo Biennial, in particular).

BIBLIOGRAPHY : « K.-N. Elnø », Ed. Martinet & Michels, Amsterdam, 1952. — Maurits Bilcke, Coll. Monographies de l'Art Belge, Ed. Elsevier, Brussels, 1959.

Originally belonging to the animist school and using, in this vein, a formula of a conventional type, **JAN COBBAERT** immediately after the war followed the trend of the period in favor of a simplified figurative style. Boats, pylons, lines of telegraph poles, reduced to vague presences, accompany colored themes limited to a few delicate modulations, dominated by restful harmonies of light grays, pale yellows and blues, which convey a certain abstraction of intimist character.

A marked change occurred in 1959 in Jan Cobbaert's approach. He began to express himself in turbulent brush strokes that particularized the subject to the uncertain limits of appearances. He thus evoked motifs marked by a real freshness of inspiration and transposition but which in fact conveyed the poignant grief of a father who has lost his young son and who is bent upon reinventing, from his own resources of emotion and fervor, in paintings of deep and powerful tonalities, the unconstrained expression of the world of childhood. This circumstance explains the many overtones of ingeniousness in a basic thematization of violence which can be perceived in his art.

This duality of high sincerity and pathos finds a wide range of expression in his works executed in 1962. An impulsive frenzy underlies the tension of the technique which aids and abets the dynamic lushness of the color,

applied in quick, radiating touches. If such canvases evoke the crude expressionism of a Jorn or an Appel, it is above all to the extent to which their author goes back in turn, with an exalted acuity, to the living sources of spontaneous emotion and of instinct.

## VAN LINT, LOUIS

Born in Brussels December 25, 1909. Studied at the Saint-Josse-ten-Noode Academy of Fine Arts.

Co-founder of the La Route Libre group (1939), of the annual Apport exhibitions, which were held from 1941 to 1945, and of the Jeune Peinture Belge circle (1945). — He collaborated in the Cobra movement. — Besides paintings, drawings and gouaches, has also done decorations and frescoes.

BIBLIOGRAPHY : L.-L. Sosset, « Louis Van Lint », Coll. Monographies de l'Art Belge, Ed. De Sikkel, Antwerp, 1941. — Robert-L. Delevoy, « Louis Van Lint », in « Quadrum », VI, 1959.

When the Brussels painter LOUIS VAN LINT turned to abstract art, about the year 1949, he had already produced a very considerable and highly appreciated body of work. Ten years before that he had in fact been the youngest of the animists, whose views, however, he did not share for long. Late-comers among the expressionists, like Albert Van Dyck or Hubert Malfait, had quietly effected a return to a sober reproduction of reality. They liked to paint sweet-faced little girls or urban landscapes, imbued with a homely charm, with a generally subdued palette. In the work of the young Louis Van Lint, however, there was nothing gentle or homely. At this period he admired particularly James Ensor and his anguishing manner of evoking the enigma concealed behind every manifestation of life. From the point of view of color, Van Lint was to express himself with even more violence than the Ostend master. He increased the intensity of the colors, which became strident and hard, to the point of hurting. He was not at all afraid of dissonances: the boldness of certain contrasts soon put him in the rank of the best talents of his generation.

The war and the occupation were not calculated to soften Van Lint's palette, nor to soften the almost hallucinated vision he had of humanity. To the contrary: it was during this period that he executed his portraits, which strike one first of all by their cruelty. In the Por-

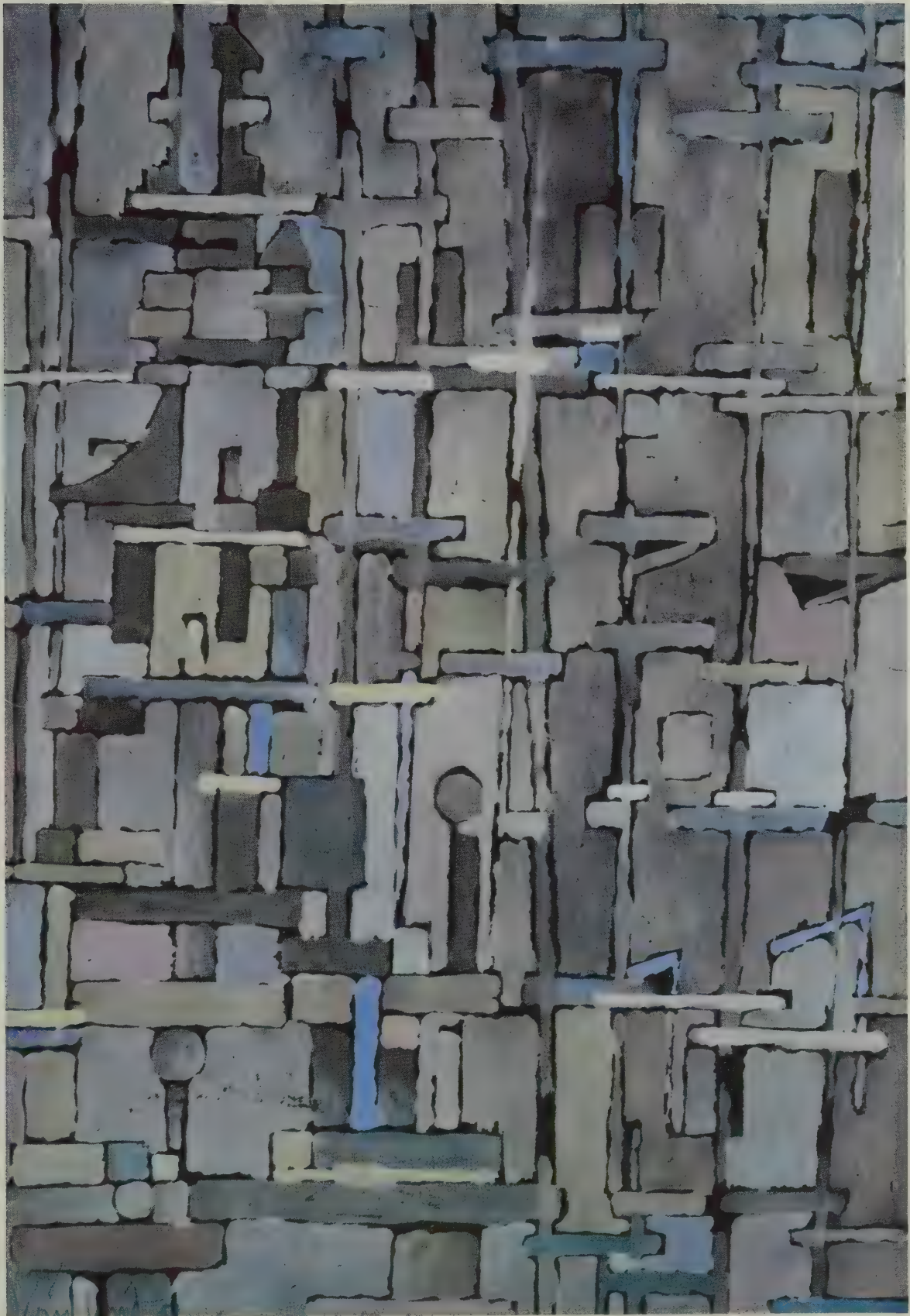
trait of *My Mother*, as in *The Man in Shirtsleeves*, which represents his father, the artist is no longer far removed from expressionist caricature. From the formal point of view, these works are characterized by their yellow-violet, blue-black, gray-red contrasts, which are more accentuated than in the previous canvases, and by a composition which could be described as systematically dislocated.

It is at this point that the transition to abstraction occurs. Van Lint was one of the first to effect this transition, which was achieved in his case in a curious way since it originated, so to speak, in the model. The paintings, the gouaches and the drawings that the artist made, in a very short space of time, at the foot of the cathedral of Saint-Michael probably still exist. They represent mainly the scaffoldings, the wooden structures that at the time enclosed the tower which was being restored. From stage to stage, the passage from the figurative to the abstract can be traced in these works. As though by some evil spell, the cords, the boards and the beams seem to detach themselves from the edifice of their own accord, and to become an autonomous and expressive whole composed of verticals and horizontals, of the same gray shade as the stones that they have supplanted. A thousand spiders hold the cathedral captive and slowly choke it. The *Scaffolding* reproduced here is of more recent date. It communicates a more peaceful impression. It is one of the few works by Van Lint in which one is immersed in an atmosphere of serenity.

Next, for a rather short time, Van Lint was to experiment a bit with geometric abstraction, but about 1950 he turned to the Cobra movement. The painter who a few years before had witnessed the first efforts of the young Pierre Alechinsky, rallied to the banner of the fiery vitalism of which he and artists of international reputation, like Karel Appel, Asger Jorn and Corneille, were the initiators. In their company he exhibited in Liège a series of large canvases whose composition is very chaotic and whose coloration is violent and contrasting. Deep reds predominate, and the line is reduced to a wild frontier between spots of color.

This anarchy, however, little suited Van Lint's nature. And he soon came back to the clarity of planes with linear contours, with colors evenly spread on the canvas, with studied compositions. The canvases of the period when Van Lint practiced geometric abstraction have indeed a very special accent. They have no relation, for example, to the work of a Herbin or a Vasarely. Van Lint's planes are much more reminiscent of the





114.  
Louis VAN LINT  
The scaffolding  
1959  
70 x 50, body-color.  
Private collection.



sharp form of a blade than of the serene unity of a square. Showing a kinship, perhaps, with the tapered planes of Magnelli, they have an eloquence which recalls the mysterious charm of the animist canvases. In addition, the bright, pure colors are discarded in favor of a subtle juxtaposition of off-whites and bluish grays, or blacks with brown undertones. Thus avoiding coldness, the painting is marked by a rich, bright sensitiveness. At this time Van Lint stated frankly that he regarded sentiment as his first concern in his approach to painting. And this was no less true when he executed non-figurative works. The difficulty that we have in expressing this very special sensibility in words is equal to the one we confront when we try to define the emotion it produces on the viewer.

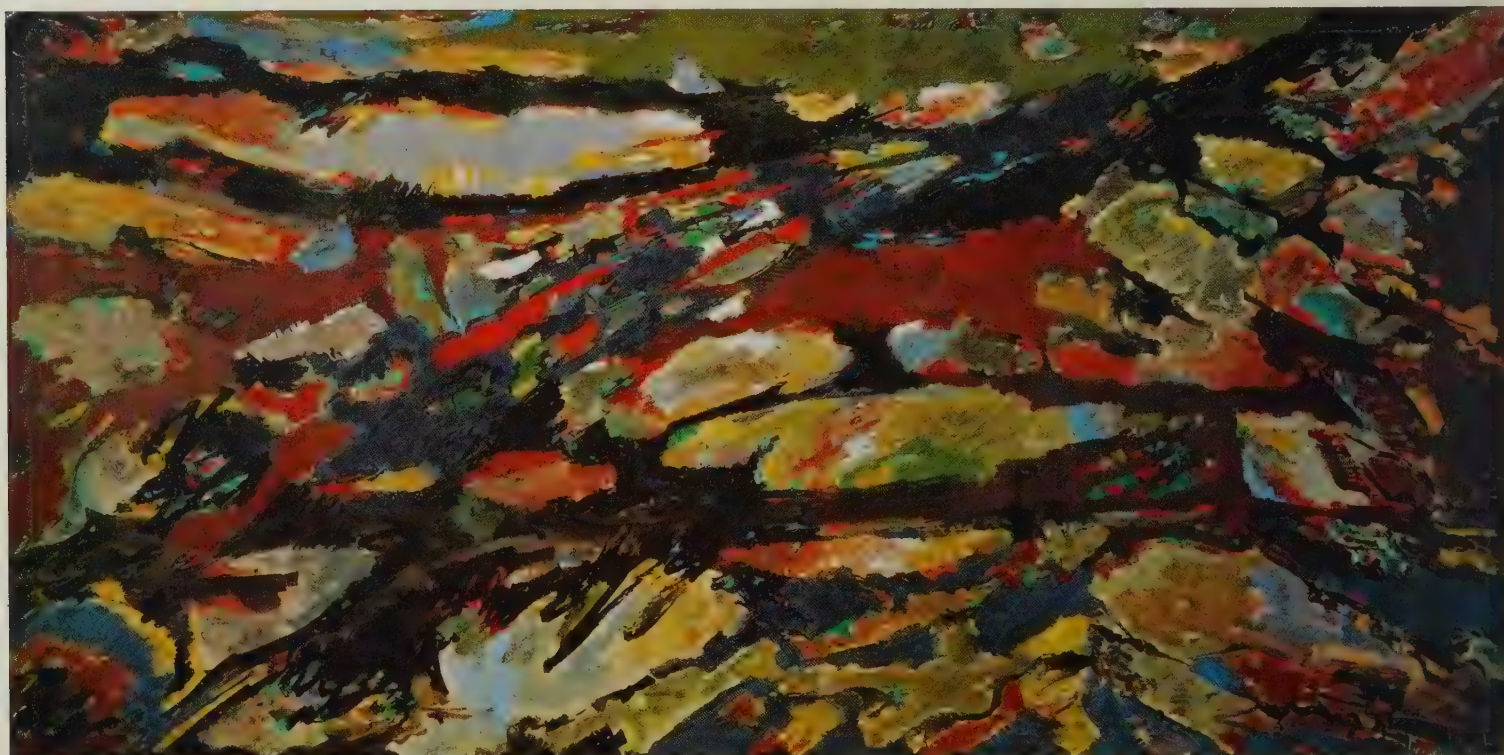
At present Van Lint judges the works of his constructivist-abstract period, highly personal though they are, very severely. It was a mistake, he says. This art, in

which everything is coldly thought out, scarcely corresponds to his nature. Might it not be concluded that Van Lint's personality is more varied and rich than he himself seems to suspect? However this may be, we find him abandoning, in about 1955, this style which he had briefly made his own. He gave greater flexibility to the composition of his canvases, reestablished the links between his colors and reality; he explores his own ideas on the essence of abstract painting as he conceives it and practices it, he renews contact with nature. This last point especially is important. But before dwelling on this, we must emphasize the influence that the French painter Jean Bazaine exerted on Van Lint's later evolution.

The first contacts between the two artists go back to the Cobra exhibition in Liège, but it was only after his geometric period that Van Lint realized more exactly the importance of Bazaine's contribution. He then under-

115.

Louis Van LINT  
Sea mirror, 1958  
150 x 295, oil on linen.  
Private collection.







116.  
Louis Van LINT  
Forest fire, 1958  
146 x 114, oil on linen.  
Private collection.

stood the boldness of a work which was first of all an exalted expression of nature, and secondarily an art of the spot, at the same time preserving an original rhythm and a perfectly clear construction. It may appear surprising that we should qualify as bold a painting which, in 1955, sought to be the expression of nature. It must be remembered that at that period such a desire may have seemed a step backward. Had not the slogan *Return to nature* already been heard in 1935? The superficial, empty works which it had produced had been deeply disappointing. Yet here Jean Bazaine was abandoning the autonomous use of color and line and reintroducing nature in his work. Not reproduced with a certain fidelity, but transfigured. It is in this transfiguration that Bazaine's originality precisely lies, and it is by virtue of it that he suddenly took a considerable lead over the artists of his generation. His position then became a paradoxical one. In 1952 he already showed tachiste canvases in which the spot was no longer anarchic, but took its place in a hierarchy which was both strictly rhythmic and singularly free. By this structured use of spots and color, the artist seemed at once to touch the organic kernel of nature itself.

It was this painting that deeply marked Louis Van Lint's evolution around 1955. He did not follow Bazaine in the formal aspect of his art: without making an about-face, his evolution on the contrary took him further and further away from the Frenchman's formal language. But as we said above, Van Lint had now discovered his true relation with nature, the symbol of his *umwelt*. This essential discovery was the point of departure for an altogether normal progression. First came some great canvases in which the red backgrounds contrasted violently with a pattern of black or green lines which made one think of the lines drawn by falling rain. Then came paintings even closer to nature, which constituted an organic whole of dead leaves, brooks and fields of snow and mud.

In all the works that Louis Van Lint has shown these last years, the capricious spots of color, like great sponges projected on the canvas, create an impression of perfect spontaneity. At the same time they participate with virtuosity in the fiery rhythm of the whole. It is nature herself which seems to sweep the forms and colors. Just as on certain canvases the water irresistibly breaks the heavy network of snow, grass or mud that holds it back for a moment. Although Van Lint no longer paints with anything but the yellow of fields of wheat, the green of leaves, the brown and black of tree trunks, the bluish and transparent gray of water, it

cannot be said that nature is all at once to be found in his canvases. What they evoke, in an imperious and almost syncopated manner, is the essence of a landscape, the formidable vitality of the matter that surrounds us, the eternal growth and generation of nature, the very principle of life, its dynamic energy.

Besides, the abstract landscape is for Van Lint, quite as much as the figurative landscape, the expression of a mood. Which means that all the motifs of his previous work, which corresponded in fact to the components of his personality, are to be found in his present work, which thereby also has the character of a confession. Many are the great works in which Van Lint lays bare a sensibility marked by hypertension at times verging on neurosis. At such times the transports of the early years seem to reappear, and one has the impression that the painter has flung his forms and colors on the canvas, with a wild rage, like so many signs of his conflicts with the outer world.

Unlike the anguishing works of Pierre Alechinsky, which express the same vital power in a more original and cerebral form, those of Van Lint engender no pessimism. His canvases touch us by their sombre frenzy: the painter appears to be struggling desperately to tear away the mists that obscure the face of man.

In these canvases blacks, browns and dull whites predominate. Van Lint was long obsessed by white, until he had brilliantly succeeded in giving it a poignant expressiveness, in particular in the works executed after his visit to Les Baux. Other works, on the other hand, are painted in reds having a vital force such that nothing in contemporary pictorial art can equal it. Here also full yellows, azure blues, tender greens fresh as spring grass burst forth. The thrust of the forces of nature does not cease and their progression inspires, not anguish or repulsion, but a joyous collaboration. The dynamism of these canvases is so intense that it acts as by contagion. The painter seeks to sweep us along in his whirl of colors, lines and volumes. His purpose is to fling us into the immense movement of life, into the crater of the prime energy. He thus creates a new baroque art. An abstract baroque which, like the preceding one, is essentially dynamic.

Such are the evolution and the meaning of Van Lint's art. Its evolution is far from having reached its culmination, but it has so far revealed, in addition to exceptional pictorial qualities, a human depth which enlightens us as to the painter and as to ourselves as well, torn as he is between anguish and exaltation, between malice and generosity.





117.  
Louis Van LINT  
Cumulus, 1959, 45 x 65, oil on linen.  
Private collection.

## UBAC, RAOUL

Born in Malmédy (Belgian Ardennes) in 1910. Had at first planned a career in the waterways and forestry service. Has lived in Paris since 1929. Enrolled in the Faculty of Letters, which he abandoned at the end of a year in order to undertake a painter's apprenticeship in the studios of Montparnasse. Devoted himself especially to photography (double exposures and montages in a surrealist spirit inspired by the work of Man Ray), contributed to the review « Minotaure » and took up etching under the guidance of S.W. Hayter (1936-1939). Walking tours through Europe between 1926 and 1934. Abandoned photography in 1945 to devote himself to painting, then to sculpture on slate. A member of the Cobra experimental group.

Has exhibited regularly in Paris (Galerie Maeght) since 1950 and participates in large international exhibitions. — Was awarded the 4th Carnegie Prize (Pittsburg) in 1952. — Often works in an old farm in the Oise.

BIBLIOGRAPHY : André Frénaud, « XXe siècle », Paris, June 1956, No. 7. — Georges Limbour, « L'Œil », Paris, May 1957, pp. 45-51. — Michel Ragon, « Cimaise », Paris, May-June 1961, pp. 12-27. — Francis Ponge and Pierre Volboudt, « Derrière le Miroir », Ed. Maeght, Paris 1961.

For many years RAOUL UBAC has had his place in the Paris school. He had his real start in 1942, although his interest in experimental photography and in graphic





118.  
Raoul UBAC  
Objects, 1959, 65 x 50, body-colour.  
Maeght Gallery, Paris.



processes had already abundantly proved his artistic predispositions. If one wished to discover the source of these, it would probably be appropriate to invoke the revelation he had, in his early youth, of works by Kandinsky and Magritte, reproduced in the review *Variété*. It was especially the carved and engraved schists, the technique of which he invented in 1947 and from which he derives novel effects today, that revealed his originality and brought him the most substantial notoriety. But this outstanding aspect of his work was constantly seconded by the practice of painting, which initially revealed the freely assimilated influence of Bissière, Bazaine and Goetz.

It was in drawing, however, that he first tested his aptitudes — large pen-and-ink drawings, minutely composed, in which familiar objects are arranged in carefully balanced still lifes, inspired by the cubist slant. The unfolding of his experience led him to interpret, first in gouaches, then in oil, in mat and reduced tones — browns, ochres, grays, subdued blues — themes that were less and less subjected to the transcription of reality (trees, imaginary heads, agricultural implements, supine bodies) of which the abbreviations that he draws from them lend themselves to a subjective interpretation.

This transition led him to paint dense pictures, reserved and secret, in which the references to reality became the furtive partners to a flight into the pure orchestration of colors of a fine, austere delicacy. This is a modification in attitude which gradually accustoms his sensibility to the idea of the autonomy of colored forms and which puts him on the path of a chromatic severity with flights of vivid hues in a checker-board pattern, an example of which appears in the present book. He also does reliefs composed of waste pieces of slate glued together with casein or of crumpled and painted tissue paper. But it is sculpture on slate, in which, according to the words of Pierre Volboudt, *the abstract fossils of rigor* are carved, to which Ubac has dedicated the best of his creative effort during the past five years.

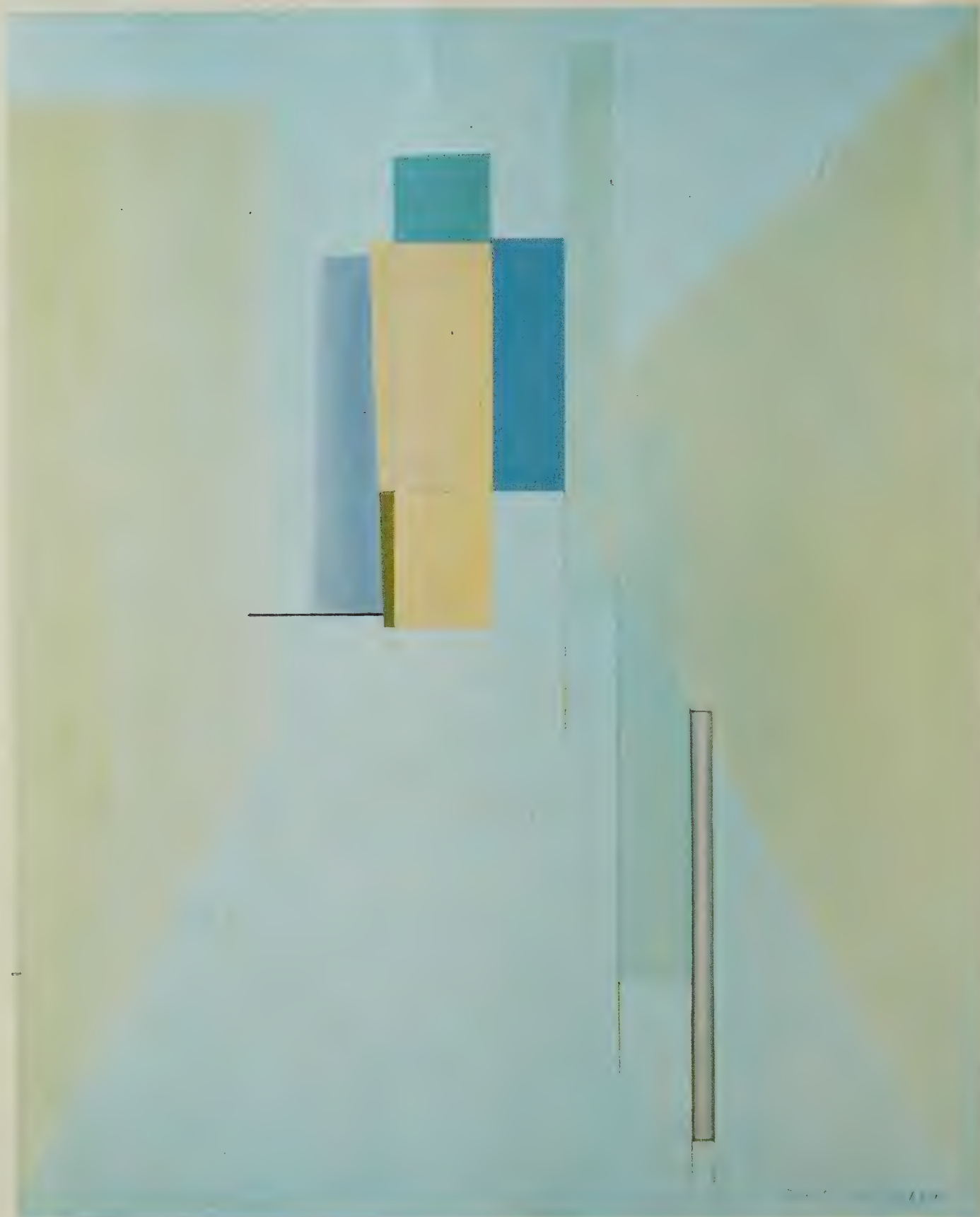
## BERTRAND, GASTON

Born September 2, 1910 in Wonk, Limburg. Studied at the Institut Saint-Luc in Brussels. Attended the Academies of Fine Arts of Saint-Josse-ten-Noode and Brussels. Co-founder of La Route Libre (1939), of the annual Apport exhibitions (1941-1946) and of the Jeune Peinture Belge group (1946).

Exhibitions in Brussels, Antwerp, Paris, Venice and São Paulo. — Lives in Uccle, near Brussels, and has a studio in Paris. — Represented in the main Belgian museums, as well as in the museums of Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo and Pittsburgh.

BIBLIOGRAPHY : Jan Walravens, « Gaston Bertrand », Ed. Kunst-Meridiaan, Brussels, 1954. — Robert-L. Delevoy, « Gaston Bertrand », Coll. Monographies de l'Art Belge, Ed. De Sikkel, Antwerp 1954. — Robert-L. Delevoy, « Gaston Bertrand », Ed. Michel Brient, Paris 1955.

In the spring of 1948 GASTON BERTRAND had a serious illness and had to remain in bed for several weeks. A geometry manual fell by chance into his hands. He thumbed through the book with interest, but what interested him was not the theorems, even though he has a mathematical bent, but the geometric drawings. He copied a certain number of them, thought up some new ones and discovered that he had a real feeling for these constructions of the mind, which are of course abstract, but remarkably balanced and attractive. He continued to draw them, colored several of them, and found that this play of forms, so bright and pure, contained the logical development of formal experiments that he had felt impelled to make, in the course of the previous years, almost without realizing it. The non-figurative painter Gaston Bertrand was born. At that time it was perhaps as much as fifteen years since Bertrand had held his first one-man show. Did the works he had shown during and after the war, and which had placed him among the best Belgian figurative painters since Permeke, provide any hint as to this switch-over to abstract art? Yes and no. No, because every figurative work presupposes an attachment to reality — an attachment which expresses itself in a lyrical or dramatic fashion by the image of what is specific to this reality. Whereas the abstract painter bases himself only on the autonomy of the expressive possibilities of colors, lines and volumes assembled in a certain order. Gaston Bertrand had been very active in what could be called the neo-expressionism of the members of the La Jeune Peinture Belge group. Like Louis Van Lint, like Anne Bonnet, he had tried to give a tangible reality to the mystery of things, and like them he had shown an indifference, an aversion even, to everyday reality. In Gaston Bertrand's canvases one could read a deliberate maliciousness which was clearly perceptible in the almost caricatural representation of the human face: townspeople palavering at a street-corner, summer vacationers jabbering on a beach. Later, he appeared to be prey to an anguish that gave to his canvases an altogether poignant Kafkaesque accent. In any case, he was scarcely indifferent to the



119.

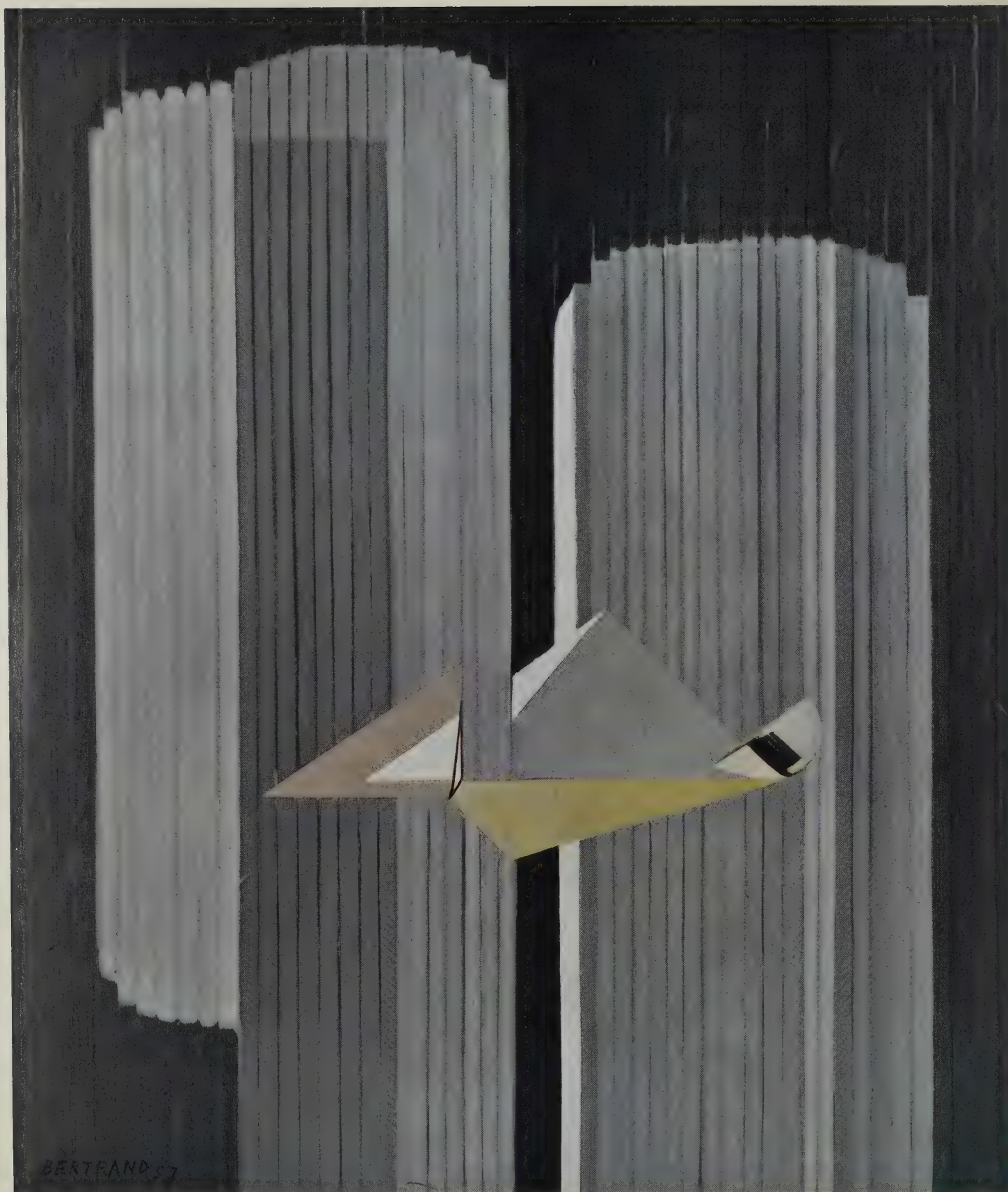
Gaston BERTRAND  
Vertical composition No. 186, 1950-1961  
81 x 65, oil on linen.  
Private collection.





BERTRAND 58

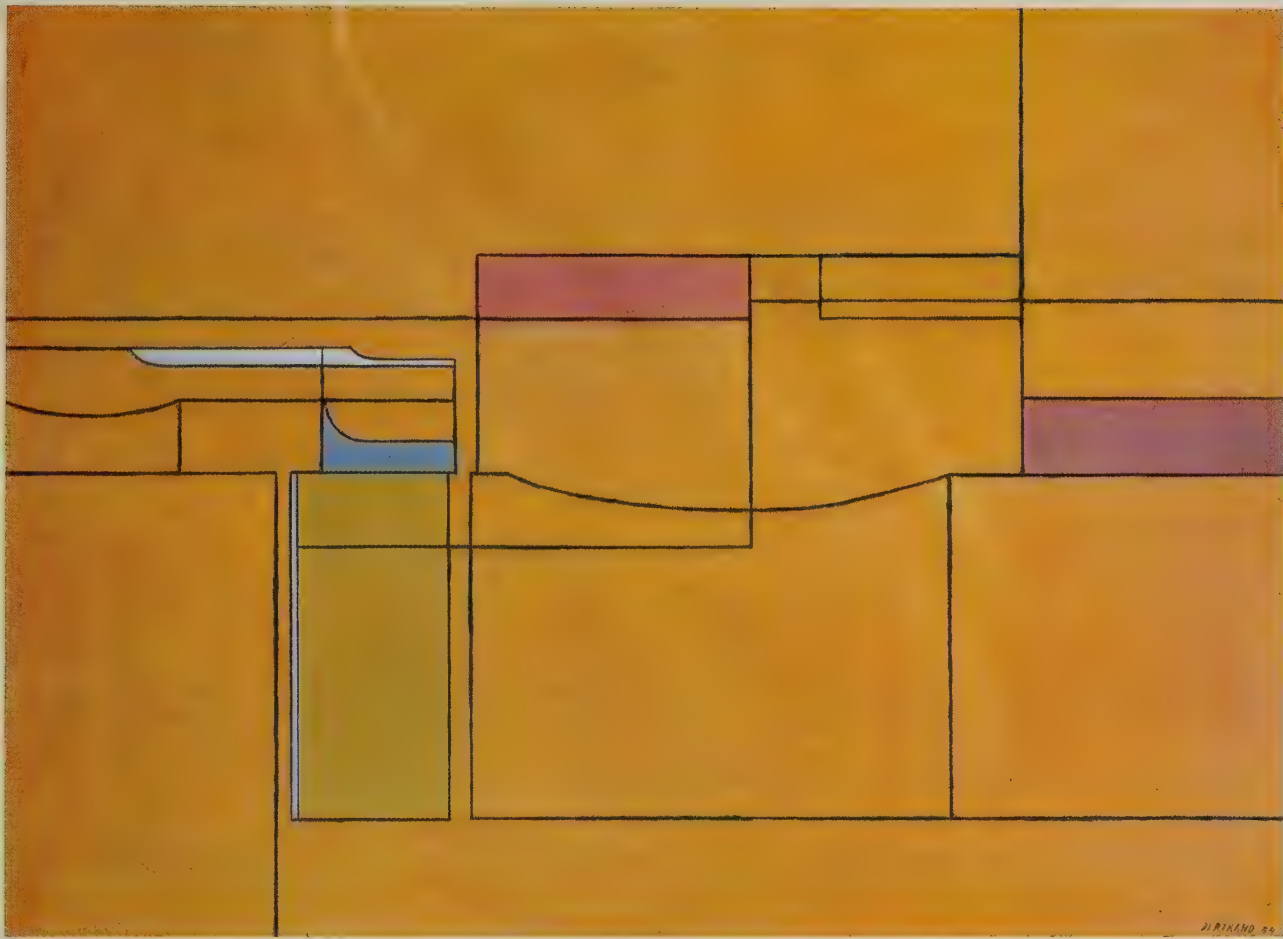
120.  
Gaston BERTRAND  
Exhibition of a triangle No. 290, 1958  
81 x 65, oil on linen.  
Private collection.



121.

Gaston BERTRAND  
Verticals-Verticals, 1957  
55 x 46, oil on linen.  
Private collection.





122.  
Gaston BERTRAND  
Forum Trajan No. 230, 1954  
73 x 100, oil on linen.  
Private collection.

outer world and his art was conditioned by what the painter meant to convey to us on the subject. What matters is seeing *how* he would convey it to us. Here one ran into two different tendencies of Bertrand's figurative style. On the one hand, certain works show a crumbling of the contours, even though all the figures are set against a background, always deliberately simplified. The contours seem to be eaten away by the frenzy of his attack, of his aggressiveness, of his criticisms. He thus achieved some impressive deformations of the human face. Less spectacular than those of Permeke, but at least equally shocking.

There were times, on the other hand, when he would work in exactly the opposite way. All the planes were

subjected both to a simplification and to an enlargement. The composition thus acquired a special sharpness and a great eloquence, based partly on the oblique lines. Here, then, preoccupations of a geometric order asserted themselves, at least to the extent to which reality was subjected to a synthesis of planes and lines, as well as to a synthesis of lines and colors, both elaborated intellectually. The coloration was maintained by preference in subdued shades and would pass, in a very deliberate way, from dark brown to spinach green. These works unquestionably foreshadowed Gaston Bertrand's abstract paintings.

When we analyze Bertrand's figurative art, we discover in it an almost demoniac emotivity, a bitterly critical



123.  
Gaston BERTRAND  
For a garden of God, 1953-1957  
81 x 65, oil on linen.  
J.J. Grima collection, Brussels



attitude toward the world, a sensitivity overwhelmed by the mystery of things : all characteristics that belong clearly in the lineage of Ensor and Munch, and which are hardly reconcilable with what abstract art brings us. But we discover in it on the other hand a style which becomes progressively simplified and clarified. And these are characteristics of non-figurative art.

When Gaston Bertrand had recovered his health (a health which, alas, remained delicate, and which has certainly had its influence in accounting for the delicacy of his subsequent work), he had been completely won over to abstract art. Indeed it seemed then that Gaston Bertrand had liberated himself from the dark side of his personality. He was more fortunate in this than Louis Van Lint, who never overcame it. In some works of 1950, as for example in *The Cathedral*, Bertrand still remains on the borderline between the figurative and the abstract, but subsequently the image of reality was to vanish entirely. There was to remain only an amazing graphic pattern, which was to renew itself constantly, and which most often was drawn in a deep black, against miraculously fresh and tender hues, ranging from gray to the frankest red. The expressionist torment gave way to an edenic, juvenile and almost feminine sensitivity. A sensitivity which opens up delicately in a climate of subtle refinement. Gaston Bertrand's art then becomes music.

The canvases reproduced here show the diversity of the palette and of the geometric constructions in the works that Bertrand has executed in the past ten years. An ever active pictorial and graphic imagination enables the artist constantly to create new forms and to situate them in an ever-changing range of colors. Never again does the harsh and thundering voice of passion resound. As though this passion were henceforth forbidden him, Bertrand no longer raises his voice : his speech is that of an inner and tranquil language which by no means implies that he lacks firmness. Bertrand no longer has recourse to brilliant surfaces : his compositions are bright and sunny, without ever appearing heated. His canvases evoke luminous beaches in the springtime, at the moment of dawn when the air turns cool and hardens in the last gusts of the night wind. More than ever his work is notable for the sensitivity that emanates from it. But the artist eschews all prodigality, all extravagance, all disorder. This probably explains why he has not felt drawn to tachisme.

It would be difficult for us to group together certain aesthetic preoccupations reflected by the works that

cover this long abstract period or to emphasize their respective relationships. In Bertrand's case, as in so many others, the language and the life of forms assume a great importance, but only a complete iconography of the work he has executed in the course of the last ten years would enable us to indicate clearly its organic evolution. The reader will obtain an insight into a few aspects of it through the canvases reproduced here. He will deduce from them that numerous and varied figures of style appear in Bertrand's work, often simultaneously. It seems, indeed, that this otherwise so well-balanced painter heeds only his formal intuition and follows no clearly drawn line.

By assembling a certain number of remarks which appear to us essential, we shall try to shed a little light on the present inspiration and certain characteristics of the work with which we are concerned. Thus, for example, the theme of the sea, often treated in the post-impressionist period and which still reappears. What the figurative painter preferred to treat was the hot and sunny beach, on which lazy vacationists sprawled. At present the human figure has disappeared from the seascapes, as have all anxiety and even all movement. Gaston Bertrand paints neither the tempest nor the tumultuous sea so dear to Constant Permeke; he is indifferent to the course of the sun above the waves. Of the spectacle of the sea he has kept only the horizontal lines and the coloring of fresh half-tones, a little cool and poetic. This is true also of his second source of inspiration : the forms of houses and the planes which combine to constitute a town. His preference is for historic cities which are striking for their ancient architecture. Italy especially has charmed the painter. What he retains above all of this reality is the play of vertical lines, from which he decants a graphic construction, marked both by severity and by fantasy. Between these two themes we find, like a connecting link, the theme of the staircase in which the painter brings out the triumph of the horizontal line. The compositions developing this theme (which is also a constant source of inspiration in Bertrand's present work) achieve, by their parallelism, a perfect serenity.

The range of colors varies from work to work. With the exception of a short period, when the artist showed a marked preference for the most definite reds, he has always kept to a bright and transparent coloration, Bertrand's colors are not subdued as they are with the animists, they never give the impression of being mixed and the artist seems to have a special aversion for too

much sizing. His coloration does not on this account lack softness and delicacy — those of a summer morning on the seashore, those of Venice at daybreak. Within the pattern of lines, almost always very sharply drawn — unless they are absent and the colors are juxtaposed from one geometric plane to another — we find many shades of gray and pink, a very tender blue and a brown that at times veers toward orange. Yellow, on the contrary, is very little used, although in a preceding figurative period Bertrand had painted almost exclusively with chrome yellow.

In what we have written about Luc Peire we tried to show that his work is essentially the abstract expression of the feelings inspired in him by a city, a mythical personage like Tessa, a dramatic event like the catastrophe of Marcinelle. Of Van Lint we have said that his art is a pure expression of his ego. Does Gaston Bertrand who likewise finds his inspiration in nature, that is, in sea or urban landscapes, offer us, for his part, an art which is synonymous with reaction or expression? Not at all. And herein precisely resides the originality that makes his work really unique in contemporary Flemish art. To be sure, the lines and the colors of his canvases are derived in a certain manner from determined aspects of reality, but not in order to express them. It may be noted, on the contrary, how they detach themselves from it. Bertrand's art in no way tends to confront us with the expression of a reality or of a character. It is an art which aims to exist only by and for itself. We have, in fact, the impression that the graphic motif and the delicate combinations of colors free themselves from the canvas and are carried up toward another universe, a universe peculiarly their own. This art can be compared only with the classical music of a Johann Sebastian Bach or the theories that Igor Stravinsky has developed in his *Poétique Musicale*. Which theories, Bertrand tells us, have strongly influenced him. Until the birth of romanticism, music which had remained virgin of the desire to express the human, had a purity of sound which the neo-classics after 1920 were to try to recapture. Its beauty — compounded of measure, of serenity, of sensibility, of poetry and of thematic refinement — lay entirely in the precise and exact relationships which united its formal elements. And it could be said that it was a poetic mathematics, an art of figures having its roots in the metaphysical universe. Which explains why it satisfies the mind as well as the heart. It may undoubtedly be said that it is an answer to the old dream expressed by Giorgio de Chirico,

for modern times, in these words: "For a work of art to be really immortal, it must go completely beyond the limits of the human."

What we have here, then, in the last analysis, is a stylistic exercise, but an inspired exercise in which the highest qualities of heart and mind are revealed. An art so purely aesthetic — aesthetics being considered here as one of the noblest activities of the individual who creates in full freedom — is inaccessible to the greatest number, who are responsive only to passionate and dramatic works. Gaston Bertrand is among those artists who make of each admirer one of the elect, ever surprised by a more and more subtle aesthetic emotion. When he paints portraits — which he has continued to do throughout his career, for he considers that our period is cruelly lacking in portraitists — even then his art rises to the level of a stylistic experience. Certain physical peculiarities of a given individual will overshadow the image of his character. Here too Bertrand's work suggests the joy of painting.

#### RETS, JEAN

Born in Paris December 6, 1910. A student at the Academy of Liège. Member of the A.P.I.A.W., of the Jeune Peinture Belge, of L'Art Abstrait and of Art Construit. Began to paint abstract canvases in 1950.

Exhibited at the Galerie Ex Libris in Brussels. — Contributed to an album of silk-screen prints published by the Art Abstrait group. — Exhibited in 1957 at the Galerie Rouge et Noire in Charleroi, with Bury, Carette, Vandenbranden, Delahaut and Van Hoeydonck. — Participated in group exhibits in Stockholm, Zurich, Milan, Bordeaux, Aix-la-Chapelle, Paris (including the *Réalités Nouvelles* exhibition), Newark, New York, Brussels Universal Exposition, 1958, Gloire des Communes Belges, 1960). — Executed large decorative works: Gare des Guillemins in Liège, the Droixhe Center, the new steel-works of the Cockerill-Mills, and private buildings. — Represented in the museums of Reims, Verviers, Ostend, Liège, Wurtzbruck.

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JEAN RETS stands out as an exception, in the sense that he remained faithful to the severely constructed composition that characterized his work when he began as an abstract painter in 1950. He was sometimes, and very rightly, called a poet of construction.





JEAN SAAR. 60

124.  
Jean RETS  
Saar, 1960, 60 x 70, oil on linen.  
Private collection.

And it is true that, despite the intelligence, the restraint, the balance, the order, and the perfect execution of his canvases, they have a relaxed logic, an unencumbered look, a natural charm. Sentiment and reason,

inspiration and craftsmanship here walk in step and endow his work with fullness as well as with purity. The plastic motive always rises above the simple decorative effect, thanks to an imagination which con-



125.  
Jo DELAHAUT  
The farewell, 1957  
146 x 97, oil on linen.  
Private collection.

delahaut ex



stantly manifests its originality in the choice of planes, of lines and colors. The resulting plastic rhythm gives to each of Jean Rets's canvases a strictly personal mark. Sobriety by no means excludes fantasy, refinement is far from contradicting reflection and calculation, cerebral effort never chokes sentiment. Although nothing is left to chance, the originality of the composition constantly affords an effect of surprise. Two planes cross, slide over one another, complete one another in a contour having a precise line. Although if considered separately they all appear autonomous, their combination nevertheless forms a coherent and indivisible whole. So that each canvas is striking for its great plastic unity. On each plane the color is applied flat, but certain of Jean Rets's canvases nevertheless give an impression of depth, which suggests a third dimension. In some, the viewer will even feel that he discovers a fourth: the dimension of time.

If a distinction can be made between easel painting and painting conceived as being destined to be integrated into architecture, Jean Rets can be regarded as also fulfilling a social role. Many private individuals, factory managers, official services make frequent calls upon his talents. The effects of his polychromes accentuate and enhance the architectural effects. His frescoes give animation to walls, his stained-glass windows, like those of the Gare des Guillemins in Liège, have a rhythm in their composition, a warmth of coloration which give them the poetic resonance of the perfectly integrated work of art.

In addition, the talent of Jean Rets may be admired in his contributions to the Doixhe Center and to the new steel-works of the Cockerill-Mills.

## DUBAIL, BERTHE

Born in Leval-Trahegnies (Hainaut) in 1911.

A figurative period influenced from 1945 by Grüber. — Devoted herself to the teaching of drawing and became interested in experimental pedagogy. Travels through central and southern Europe. — Sojourns in Paris in 1953-1954 and 1961-1962.

BERTHE DUBAIL in 1956 went over to an instinctively conceived abstraction. But since that time she has varied her interpretations and her techniques in order to find the most appropriate way to use this new language of the sensibility which she considers to be her essential mode of expression.

## DELAHAUT, JO

Born in Vottem (Liège), July 22, 1911. 1928-1934 : Attended drawing courses at the Liège Academy in Mambour's class. 1935 : Licence degree in the history of art and in archeology (University of Liège). 1939 : Doctor's thesis on neo-classicism in Belgium. 1940 : Began to paint.

1942 : First exhibit (Nouvelles Galeries, Charleroi) : fauviste canvases. — 1945 : Settled in Brussels. First abstract works. — 1946 : First exhibit of abstract works (along with figurative ones) at the Galeries Lou Cosyn in Brussels and Le Parc in Charleroi. Exhibited abstract paintings with the Apport group at the Galerie Apollo in Brussels and with the Jeune Peinture Belge group in La Louvière. — 1947 : Exhibited with the Jeune Peinture Belge group at the Palais des Beaux-Arts of Brussels, as the only abstract painter of the group. Participated for the first time in the Salon des Réalités Nouvelles in Paris, which he continued to do until 1956. — 1952 : Founded the Art Abstrait group in Brussels, which published an album with an introduction by Roger van Gindertael and Albert Dupuis and which exhibited at the Palais des Beaux-Arts. — 1953 : Publication of the second album of the Art Abstrait group, with an introduction by René Massat, Maurits Bilcke and Sélim Sasson. Exhibited at the Kunstkabinet Horemans paintings, drawings, reliefs and sketches for frescoes done with the collaboration of the architect Victor Bourgeois. — 1954 : Published the « Manifeste Spatialiste », signed by Delahaut, Horemans, Séaux and Bury. In September, organized the exhibit Les Premiers Abstraits Belges at the Galerie Saint-Laurent in Brussels, with the collaboration of Tousseint (of the same Gallery) and Maurits Bilcke. — 1956 : Exhibit of paintings, mobiles and spatial reliefs at the Galerie Saint-Laurent. Published the third volume of the Art Abstrait group under the title of « Art Abstrait-Formes ». Founded a new group, « Formes », together with Jean Séaux and Maurits Bilcke. May : Exhibition by this group in Morlanwelz. Fresco at the Foyer Montagnard in Montignies-sur-Sambre (architect : Victor Bourgeois). — 1957 : Two reliefs in concrete for the Champ des manœuvres group of buildings in Liège (Arch : group Egau). Decoration of the Council Room at the Centrale d'Electricité of Liège. June : Exhibition of the Formes group at the Galerie Accent in Antwerp. Catalogue introduction by Seuphor, Séaux and Bilcke. — 1958 : Decoration of the Palais des Congrès in Liège. — 1959 : Lyrical canvases. Exhibits at the Galerie Accent in Antwerp and at the Palais des Beaux-Arts in Brussels. — 1960 : Return to geometric canvases. Exhibited with Lewy and Vonck at the Galerie Raaklijn in Bruges, with an introduction by Maurits Bilcke. Together with Jean Séaux and Maurits Bilcke, founded the Art Construit circle. The group exhibited, along with numerous foreign guests, at the Musée d'Ixelles, February 2 to 28, under the title : Art Construit. Public discussion at the Palais des Beaux-Arts in Brussels : The Integration of plastic arts in architecture. A 20 square-meter piece of ceramics for the architect Brunfaut in Evere. A piece of ceramics for the Athénée Royal in Pont-à-Celles (architect : Brunfaut). Mural decoration for A chacun sa maison (A House for everyone) in Evere (architect : Willy van der Meeren). Publication of an album of silk-screen prints, with an introduction by Michel Seuphor and Charles De Maeyer. — 1962 : Exhibition at the Palais des Beaux-Arts in Brussels. — Moreover, participated in the following exhibitions : Il Camino, Rome, 1954 ; Prix Lissone 1955 ; Carnegie Institute 1955 ; Japan : Journal Mainichi 1953 and 1954 ; São Paulo 1953 ; Permanente Palace, Milan ; 21st Century, Charleroi ; Stanleyville, Elisabethville, etc.

BIBLIOGRAPHY : M. Seuphor, « Dictionnaire de la peinture abstraite », Paris 1957. — Jean Séaux, « Delahaut », Coll. Monographies de l'Art Belge, Ed. De Sikkel, Antwerp, 1955. — Charles de Maeyer, « Prisme des Arts », No. 9, 1956. —

Sélim Sasson, « Journal des Beaux-Arts », Brussels, December 1952. — Van de Voorde, « De Standaard », February 1957. — Max Guilmoit, « Enseignement », August 1960. — Delahaut has written « Le dessin à l'école, Contribution à l'école nouvelle, Principes d'éducation plastique », Edit. Sept Art, Brussels, 1957.

JO DELAHAUT was the pioneer of the second generation of abstractionists in Belgium. In 1947, at the first great manifestation of the Jeune Peinture Belge at the Palace of Fine Arts, he was the only abstract painter among the thirty-four participants.

Delahaut attributes a primordial value to concepts such as *conscience*, *intelligence* and *spirit*. Few are the constructivist painters who are so conscientious and steadfast in translating an inner pictorial vision into a plastic reality. Delahaut began to paint only at the age of twenty-nine. He painted in a fauviste style which gradually leaned in the direction of a simplified representation of the subject. The stylized surfaces and lines opened the way to purely abstract compositions in which the broad black contour still played a rather important role in the matter of linking and structure. At this point in his career Delahaut was already far ahead of Dewasne and Vasarely on the path to rigorously geometric composition. The curved surfaces progressively disappear, as well as the broadened contour. The abstract figure, which at first stood out like a skeleton against the background, gave way to a pattern of planes which became generalized. By their relations and their rhythm, their surfaces and their colors, their orientation and their dimensions, all these planes had an equal value on the plane surface of the canvas. Pure and fundamental geometric forms rarely appeared in these compositions which usually presented the acute or obtuse angles of inclined or sloped planes.

But let us listen to the painter himself: "I avoid the unforeseen, I shun the uncertainties of chance, the inconstancy of the brush stroke, the mood of the moment, the involuntary quivering of a line... Any trembling must be the result only of a minute calculation, of an unwavering tension. Logic appeals to me. Improvisation frightens me. It seems to me that an intelligent retouch must go beyond the first sketch. I consider ingenuousness to be a dangerous gift, in fact a defect which it is urgent to get rid of as soon as possible."

Such a statement might make one believe that all surprise is excluded from Delahaut's work. Such is far from being the case. In 1952, Delahaut painted a canvas entitled *Acor*, which amazed those who were

familiar with his work, and visitors to the Quadrennial Salon of Liège in 1953 were disconcerted when they saw four horizontal series of six *U-shaped forms* against a background having, in the lower left corner, a square, and to the extreme right a broad strip which filled one-quarter of the width of the canvas from top to bottom. This was the beginning of thematic composition in the evolution of Delahaut's art. Subsequently we would see the *U-shaped form* split in two and the theme of the *J-shaped form* would appear. The latter was used in a series of vertical-horizontal repetitions and gave rise to compositions having a subtlety reminiscent of Johann-Sebastian Bach's variations on a theme.

The thematic composition, however, was to be progressively abandoned in 1955. The following years saw Delahaut devoting his talents to the integration of the plastic arts in architecture. In this field he did remarkable pioneer work in our country. In 1954, with Bury, Elnó, and Séaux, he signed the manifesto *Spatialism*, in which we read: "Art must participate in daily life. It must be integrated in the daily setting and thus help man free himself from the past and adapt himself to the present."

Then, for two years (1958-1959), Delahaut again gave free rein to the fauviste inspiration, but this time launching into an abstract lyricism and using a sensual paint quality. This surprising experiment lasted but a short time. That his path was marked out and lay in a different direction was brilliantly proved by his recent exhibition at the Palace of Fine Arts in Brussels (1962). It testified to a great plastic richness, to a remarkable mastery and maturity in means of expression. Never had Delahaut so clearly, so radically given concrete form to his declaration of 1951. The number of planes has diminished, and their surface has spread. In this expanse — or is it a space? — a disk is poised, perfect as a full moon in the serenity of the night. Sometimes a circle segment is cut off by the straight line of the frame. Other canvases show truncated ramifications of broad straight and curved ribbons. In each of these two series, the plastic stress is brought to its culminating point. What finally remains in each painting is nothing more nor less than a concept in the purest, the most powerful, and the sincerest pictorial state. Aesthetic forms, on the level of ideas, participate in a definitive way in what is infinite in time and space. This result goes beyond simple pictorial merit: in our period of collective confusion, it is an unquestionable moral example.



## HAECK, RIGOBERT

Born in 1912.

One-man shows : 1955, at the Cheval de Verre Gallery, Brussels. — 1956 : Studio Rik Wouters, Brussels. — 1958 : Studio Elmar, Ghent and Galerie Celbeton, Termonde. — 1960 : Galerie Le Zodiaque, Brussels. — 1961 : V.T.B. Studio, Ghent. — Haeck also produces ceramics and sculpture.

BIBLIOGRAPHY : Maurits Bilcke, Introduction for the exhibit at the Le Zodiaque Gallery, November 1960 ; « De Gazet van Antwerpen », November 3, 1960.

## HEERBRANDT, HENRI

Born 1913 in Brussels. Studies at the St-Luc School of this city. Drawer and engraver as well as painter.

Exhibited for the first time in 1948. — Lives almost wholly withdrawn from the art movement and has exhibited only on rare occasions.

HENRI HEERBRANT's work has considerable affinities with oniric art and surrealism. Heerbrant began by borrowing these themes from popular imagery and esoteric literature. The revelation which Paul Klee's inventive contribution constituted for him induced him to give free rein to his imagination. Open to all metamorphoses and all caprices, his improvising fancy lets itself go in a perpetual back-and-forth movement between figuration and abstraction. The drawings, gouaches, monotypes, etchings which he practices in preference to oil, with the skill of a virtuoso, display the innumerable resources of his graphic verve.

## BOËL, MAURICE

Born in Ostend February 2, 1913. A student at the Académie des Beaux-Arts of Brussels and at the Grande Chaumière in Paris.

Exhibitions in Ostend and in Brussels.

The vision of Flemish expressionism communicates itself by preference in volumes. It tends to oppose heavy, at times monochrome masses, to produce an impression of irresistible power.

MAURICE BOËL, having for a long time followed in the traces of expressionism, has never been able to

liberate himself from this obsession with volumes, which as he sees it are needed to give its expressive value to the canvas. He succeeded, nevertheless, in modifying both their tonality and the background against which they stood. And having done so, the sensitivity of his works profoundly changed : it was the outcome of a victorious struggle against the ascendancy of the expressionist volume.

Originally a landscape and still life painter, Maurice Boel progressively passed over to abstraction, basing himself on an arabesque of which the line became more and more simplified. In the canvases of his present period his main preoccupation appears to be measure and the combination of volumes. But these have lost their squat and massive aspect. Like trees, organ pipes or long-legged silhouettes, they thrust upward. Their juxtaposition is always harmonious, although their dimensions vary greatly. Their coloration is uncompromisingly candid, but the background is kept to a delicate grisaille. The range of colors, in which gold at times discreetly appears, attracts by its richness and charms because of the perfect mastery of the gray. All the works that Maurice Boel is at present turning out have an aristocratic decorative effect that is highly impressive and a warm refinement, only rarely to be found in modern Flemish art.

## LEUNENS, GUILLAUME

Born in Hal September 30, 1914. After a brief course of study at the Molenbeek-Saint-Jean Academy of Fine Arts, his training was almost entirely self-directed.

Exhibitions in Paris, Madrid, Barcelona, Tunis, Deauville and Brussels. — Lives in Paris where his work is promoted and handled by the Galerie de Verneuil.

BIBLIOGRAPHY : Xavier-France, « Leunens, peintre de vie », Ed. La Sève, Brussels, 1956.

Influenced especially by Jean Brusselman's expressionist cubism, GUILLAUME LEUNEN's figurative painting had an essentially nocturnal effect. It tried, by means of heavy color constructions, in which dark blue contrasted violently with bright yellow and brick-red, to convey the feeling of the mysteries of the night. In 1958, Guillaume Leunens broke away from the representation of nature. He has since then devoted himself to the attempt to seize the very essence of what could be called "the absence of light". To this

end he engages in numerous experiments with the most unexpected materials and ingredients: colors, iron, lead, aluminium, copper, glass, ink and even coffee grounds. With these he makes dark and at the same time vibrant surfaces, accentuating their mysterious opaqueness by a fine white line or a red dot. The works of this tormented artist, who is at times as violent as van Gogh, do not all have the same intensity. But in his best moments Leunens succeeds in evoking the fascination of total darkness.

## ROVER

Pseudonym of Roger Vercruyssen, born in Roulers, November 9, 1914. For two years a student at the Ecole Technique Supérieure (textile designing) in Courtrai.

1932: Worked in a sculptor's studio. — 1934-1935: Textile designer. — 1936-1937: A student at the Antwerp Academy. — 1938: Attended courses at the Higher Institute in Florence. Trip to Rome. Became friendly with the poet Bertus Aafjes. — 1941: Publication of the work «Het Schilderij en zijn genieten». — 1947: Received diploma to teach drawing in secondary schools. Member of the Jeune Peinture Belge. — 1951: Participated in the Jeune Peinture Belge exhibition in Liège. — 1952: First single artist show, Unicum Gallery, Bruges. — Since then, the following one-man shows: Elmar (Ghent) in 1953, Ars (Ghent) in 1954, Rik Wouters (Brussels) in 1957, Le Zodiaque (Brussels) in 1958, Celbeton (Termonde) in 1959, Kunstcabinet Bellegeer (Brussels) in 1961.

BIBLIOGRAPHY: Maurits Bilcke, Invitation to the Zodiaque exhibit, Brussels, April 26, 1958; «De Gazet van Antwerpen», November 6, 1957, May 16, 1958. — Jaak Fontier, «De Periscoop», Brussels, Winter 1961-1962.

ROVER has gone through an evolution which hardly differs from that of many Flemish painters: he turned to a solidly constructed abstract form after having been an adept of figurative expressionism. His work is relatively varied as to its conception and the means used. He has done so-called geometric canvases, collages which reveal a lively imagination, dynamic mural reliefs in copper strips. Thus he seeks a variety of solutions to give the most logical formal expression to the material chosen. Of an eager and alert turn of mind, he tries to communicate to his work a tension which is serene and in no way opposed to the mysterious smile of poetry. Rhythm and space are the major objects of his concern, while the specific possibilities of each material are both respected and exploited to the fullest possible extent.

## DUPUIS, JACQUES

Born in Quaregnon, December 30, 1914. Studied architecture at the Institut National Supérieur d'Architecture et des Arts Décoratifs de la Cambre (I.N.S.A.A.D.).

Exhibition in Paris in 1960.

BIBLIOGRAPHY: Albert Bontridder, «Une architecture à la mesure de l'homme», in «Architecture», May 1961.

JACQUES DUPUIS is the representative in Belgium of a flexible and neo-baroque architecture, which reintroduces movement into the art of building. His structures differ radically from the cubist style of the preceding generations. The architect no longer hesitates to create surprises, to evoke a poetry which bears his mark, "to be human", as Albert Bontridder says. As a painter, Jacques Dupuis remains faithful to geometrical abstraction, although he introduces curved elements which suggest racetracks seen from the sky and recall certain aerial pictures. His compositions are severely balanced, while his coloration is often violent. "Painting sharpens the fingers," he says, "and stimulates in me a healthy anger."

## MATTHIJS, LODE

Born in Anderlecht January 1st, 1915.

In 1948 won the Prix de l'Académie royale des sciences, des lettres et des beaux-arts de Belgique.

Exhibits in Brussels.

## SILVIN

The pseudonym of Silvin Bronkart, born in Liège in 1915. A student at the Ecole St. Luc until 1939.

SILVIN began in 1946 to take part in local *avant-garde* activities and soon joined the Belgian section of Cobra. After executing angular, broken compositions of linear structure, has for some years painted in a vein close to tachisme. Josée Picon, also a native of Liège (she was born in 1921), belongs to the same tendency.



## IDE-PEREZ, MARIA-JOSEFA

Born in Cartagena (Spain) in 1915. Art and literary studies in Madrid. Settled in Antwerp where she attended the Academy and the Higher Institute of Fine Arts.

After a series of travels, organized her first exhibition in Milan, followed by others in Brussels, Antwerp, The Hague, Paris, Trieste, Buenos Aires. Has likewise participated in several group exhibitions in Belgium and abroad.

MARIA-JOSEFA IDE-PEREZ affirms her predilection for a painting without linear substructure, of non-formal character, a painting which finds its major inspiration in the visual expression of the non-organized. Subtle stratifications of shaded tones and of confused transparencies splashed with a swarming of fiery spots express a temperament that is both ardent and delicate, irrepressible and tender. Enamored of freedom in her art, Ide-Perez opens her talent to all the possibilities of inspired improvisation.

## MENDELSON, MARC

Born in London in 1915 of an English mother and a Belgian father. In 1922 he accompanied his parents to Antwerp where he studied at the Advanced Institute of Fine Arts.

His first exhibition in Antwerp in 1942. — Founding member of the Jeune Peinture Belge group in 1945. — Travels to England, the Netherlands, Germany, Sweden, France, Italy, Spain where he stayed several times at Palamos. — His most recent one-man shows in 1963 at the Palais des Beaux-Arts in Brussels, in Dordrecht and Amsterdam. — Has often participated in important group events in Belgium and in other countries : Venice Biennial (1948 and 1956), São Paulo Biennial (1951 and 1953), Carnegie Foundation Prijs (Pittsburgh, 1952, where he won a mention, and in 1955), Documenta II, (Cassel, 1959), etc. — Works in several museums and private collections of Europe and America. — A teaching appointment in 1951, then professor of silk-screen printing at the Ecole Nationale Supérieure d'Architecture et des Arts Décoratifs (E.N.S.A.A.D.). — Mural paintings in public buildings.

BIBLIOGRAPHY : Jean Séaux, Coll. Monographies de l'Art Belge, Edit. De Sikkel, Antwerp, 1953. — Jan Walravens, « Peinture Contemporaine en Belgique », Edit. Hélios, Antwerp, 1961, p. 33.

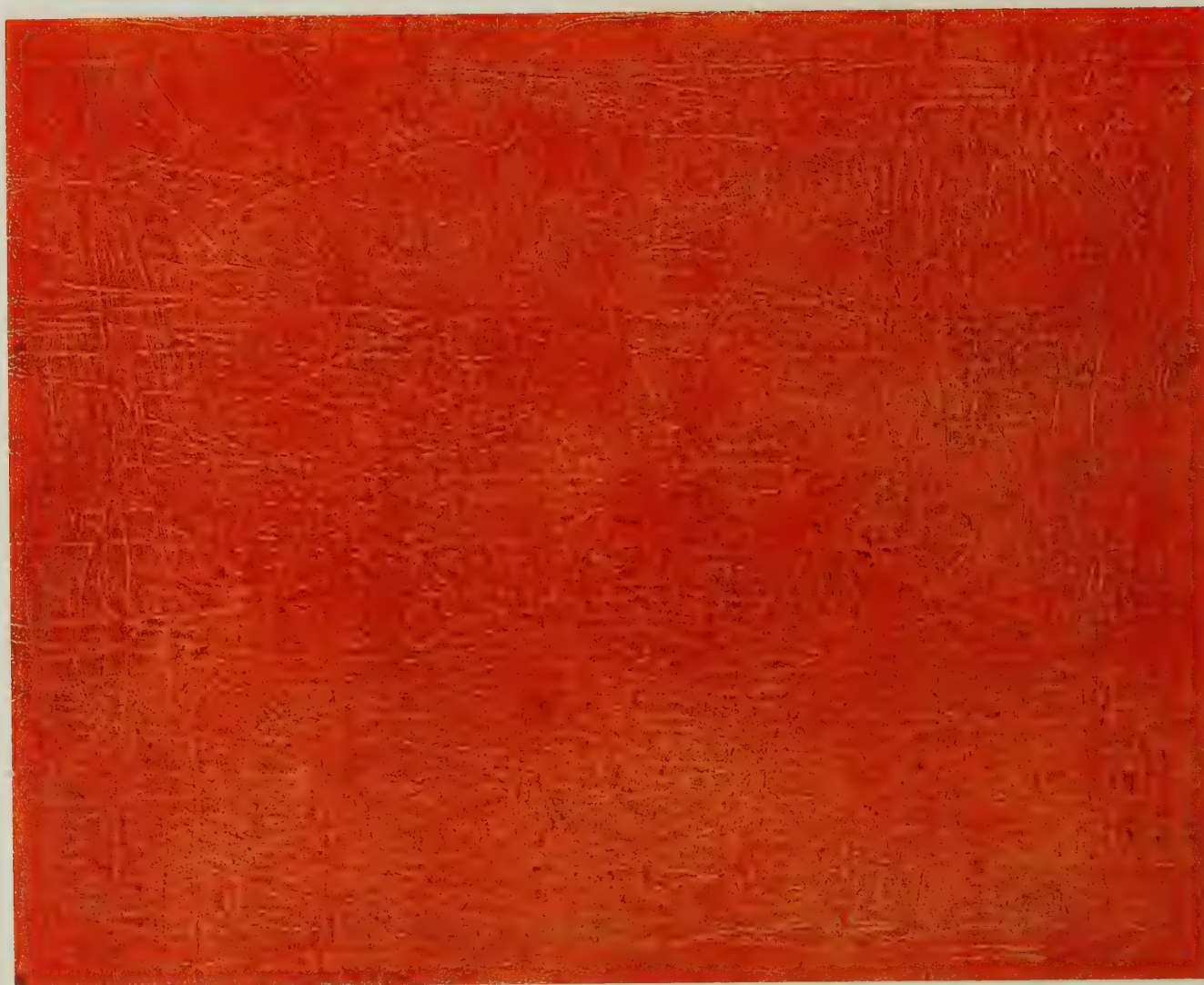


126.

Marc MENDELSON  
The great tellurian, 1961  
150 x 195, oil on linen.  
Private collection.

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127.  
Marc MENDELSON  
Coral breakfast, 1962  
130 x 162, oil on linen  
Private collection.

A glance at MENDELSON's work between 1938 and 1950 reveals, in a repertory of still lifes and figures, a succession of influences, impulses, experiments which seem to reflect as many phases of a capricious evolution but which are in fact the reflection of a will to assimilate manners of painting in terms of the instinctual singularity that the artist assigns to them. His long apprenticeship, from the sentimental verism of his initial period to the figurative metamorphoses

that make their appearance immediately after the war, parallels the ample prelude that stimulated most of his fellows in the Jeune Peinture Belge group to find their special ways of catching and interpreting the data of the visible. An aesthetic apprenticeship, in short, of a renewed conception of art, specific to a period in the throes of mutation. Throughout this ferment of ideas, of urges, of experiments, Mendelson unfailingly preserved a great dignity of craftsmanship,



encouraged by his disciplined consciousness of freedom.

Thus the notion of a painting without image which came to him about 1952 and produced ordered and structured compositions in which the classifying bi-dimensionality plays a preponderant role, came into being, grew and took form. His canvases of this period were based on certain types of forms dictated by the yardstick of geometry, but to which the instinct for modulations of color as much as the asymmetry of their resonance zones brought a kind of relaxation. Thus he received the lesson of a certain morphological determinism which was then in favor in our *avant-garde* circles. But this orientation could equally well be attributed to the cultural index of a city-dweller accustomed to formulating his conceptions in the margin of or out of direct touch with nature.

His painting today bears little resemblance to those earlier works. His visits to Catalonia in 1953 and 1956 resulted in his breaking away from a cerebral approach to his art. The geological, mineral and plant world that then absorbed him led him to confirm what surrounded him by what he felt. Drawings and gouaches reveal the complete change that operated in his turn of mind. He proceeded to give free rein to his perceptions and to supplant the geometric style by an affective and even lyrical animation.

From this point on his art took shape in an increasingly affirmed unity. The Spanish experience, relived in inner monologue, enriched the materiality of his painting with a secret radiance which can be considered the fruit of a slow and complex maturing. Gradually, Mendelson concentrated his attention on the variety of textures, fields of thickness and areas of transparency of the colored substance. These features are for him a language which expresses the tectonic effects by which he is haunted. A whole context of sediments, of river deposits, of strata forms and develops in subtle variations of reliefs and inflections, generally monochrome, in which whites, ochres and blacks appear by turns.

Etched, outlined or integrated in the solidity of a rich impasto, generously molded, a mysterious efflorescence of veins, impressions and signs articulated in luxuriant graphic links appears before us. Their concerted connections and the associative harmonies that they propagate reveal to us, in a century subjected to technology and utilitarianism, the vision of an intuitive universe whose suggestions might well belong to ages forgotten by or unknown to humanity.

## NOEL, VICTOR

Born in Dour (Borinage), January 3, 1916. Student at the Mons Academy. From 1942 : Professor at the Tournai Academy where he teaches decorative painting and commercial art. 1954 : First abstract canvases.

One-man shows at the Galerie Saint-Laurent in 1956, 1957 and 1959. — 1956 : Group exhibition *Formes* in Morlanwelz and *Défense du Petit Format* at the Saint-Laurent Gallery, Brussels. — 1957 : Group exhibition *Formes* at the Accent Gallery, Antwerp. — 1960 : *Art Construit* at the Ixelles Museum, *Art Abstrait* at the Galerie de la Madeleine, Brussels. — 1961 : *Peintres et sculpteurs du Tournaisis*, Tournai. *Parallèles*, Galerie Saint-Laurent, Brussels.

BIBLIOGRAPHY : Maurits Bilcke, « De Gazet van Antwerpen », April 20, 1956 ; April 17, 1957 ; December 2, 1959. — Paul Caso, « Le Soir », May 5, 1957. — André Marc, « La Lanterne », April 11, 1956 ; April 16, 1957 ; « La Dernière Heure », April 15, 1956.

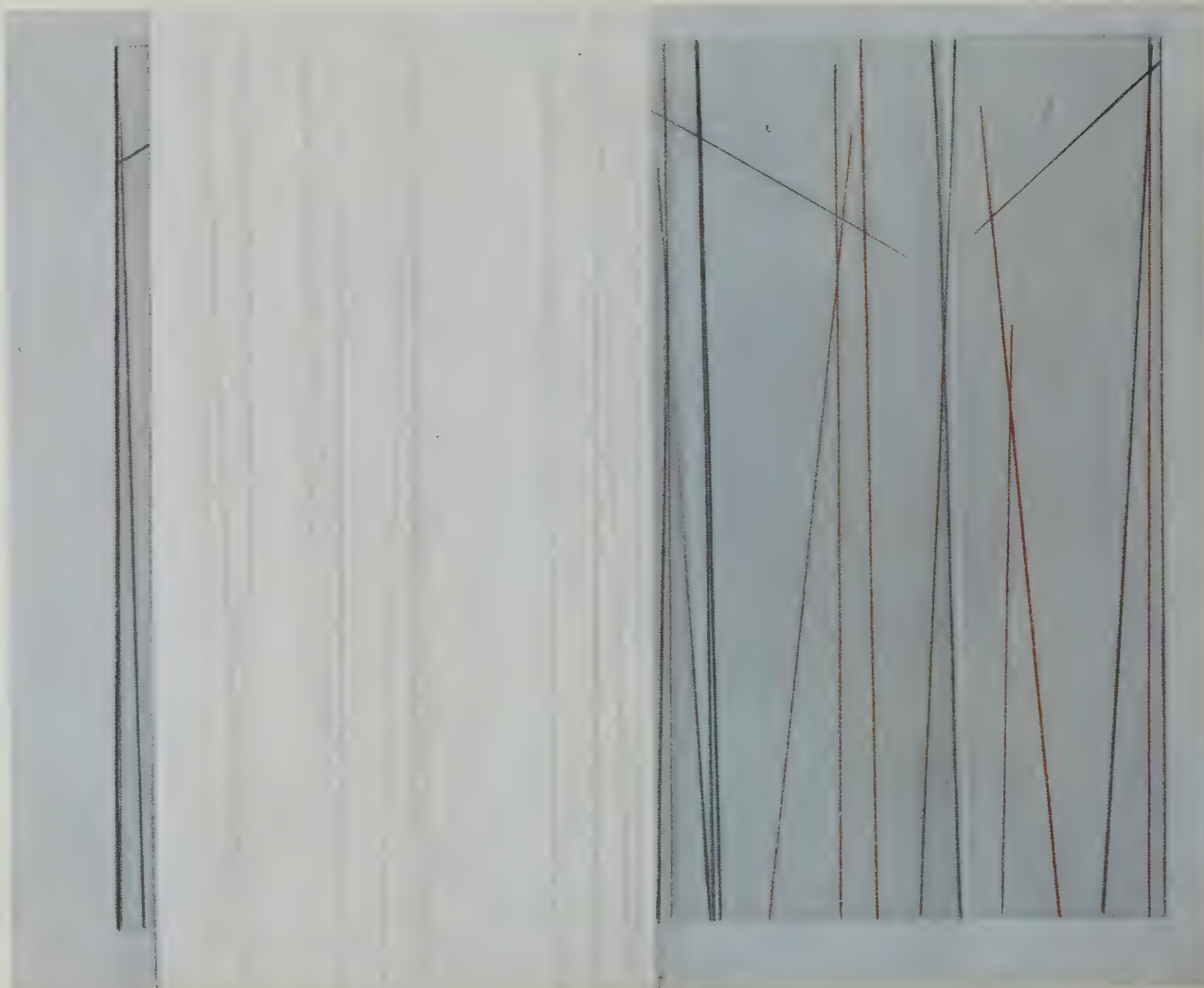
VICTOR NOEL is the creator of compositions in which straight lines and elegant curves, a thin coat of color, evenly spread, and ingenious secants are the outstanding features. The secants produce an interaction of positive and negative elements. In his most recent work, the composition is simplified and becomes more powerful and more personal. In certain canvases the plastic theme is even reduced to a strict minimum — as in the latest constructivist works of Emile Bergen, who is making constant progress — and through this pictorial asceticism Noël achieves a serenity rare in our painting. Once again we are reminded of Bach's fugues before so much richness, the product of a sober refinement, before this innate purity and this wonderfully balanced construction. In Victor Noël's highly personal work, the deliberately limited palette is always determined by the clearness of the form.

## PEIRE, LUC

Born in Bruges July 7, 1916. Studied at the Academy of Fine Arts of his native city, at the Institut Saint-Luc of Ghent and at the Antwerp Institute of Fine Arts. Many trips to Spain (where he met Eduardo Westerdahl and Alberto Bartoris), to Italy, Morocco, the Congo and South Africa.

Co-founder of the *Jeune Peinture Belge*. — Represented in the museums of Paris, Brussels, Antwerp, Bruges, Barcelona, Bogota, Ténériffe and others.

BIBLIOGRAPHY : Eduardo Westerdahl, « Luc Peire », Edit. Estudios Hispánicos, Ténériffe 1952. — Roger Avermaete, « Luc Peire », Coll. *Kunstmonografieën van de Belgische Kunst*, Edit. De Sikkel, Antwerp 1954. — K.-N. Eino, L.-L. Sosset, Eduardo Westerdahl and Jan Walravens, « Luc Peire », Bruges 1959. — Jaak Fontier, « Luc Peire », De Vlaamse Gids, Brussels 1961.



128.  
Luc PEIRE  
Modulation, 1961  
50 x 61, oil on linen.  
Private collection.

Almost all the abstract artists dealt with in this book began with figurative painting. Some of them have even gone back to it, enriched by the experience of autonomous color acquired in the course of their abstract period. In the case of most of them, the passage to abstract art resulted in liberating and renewing their personality, which would previously have been unimaginable. By this we by no means wish to imply that abstract art is more valid than figurative art. The fact that we have marked preferences for certain

painters in no way inclines us to prefer, in principle, a given pictorial theory to another. What we were saying, however, proves how explosive and fertilizing were the theories of Kandinsky and Mondrian, which influenced so many contemporary Belgian painters. Thanks to abstract art our artists have been able to discover how vast and varied their means of expression could be. Thanks to it, they have achieved a productivity which their previous attempts, more or less maladroit, gave no grounds to anticipate.





129  
Luc PEIRE  
Solitude, 1955, 60 x 50, oil on linen.  
Private collection.

For no painter does this remark hold more true than for LUC PEIRE. To such a point that today his whole work could be subdivided into a not too impressive figurative period, a rather long period of transition and finally an abstract period, characterized by a growing simplification of the composition and a progressive subtlety in the use of color. The last period, then, can be regarded as the crowning of years of effort, valid to the extent to which they have prepared the present work and made it possible.

In reality certain characteristics of Luc Peire's abstract work can be observed very early in his previous canvases. This artist, who surely has a drop of Spanish blood in his veins, has been concerned with style from the very beginning, and this can already be observed in the severe, sombre portraits that he painted when he was twenty. He has always worked at his canvases with a passion which he has been able to communicate and make felt. His dramatic accent is already present in the deep browns of the *Jeune Peinture Belge* period, and at times he shows cruelty, as in the *Coq assassinés* which he painted at that time. In this period the painter still felt very close to reality, and his first concern was to seize the specific character of his motifs and render them in a moving way. It was an expressionist type of preoccupation, which later proved to be little suited to the artist's nature. As Luc Peire learned to create a purely plastic climate in a space of lines and colors which was his own, his art became more personal and more original.

The transition, we said, was a long one, but in fact it was accomplished through a limited number of "arguments". Peire has expressed great gratitude to the Spanish critic Eduardo Westerdahl. In Ténériffe he had many conversations with him on the subject of art, and Westerdahl later wrote some penetrating pages on the painter's work.

The fact of having remained for a long time away from the too familiar climate of Flanders, and of having had contacts, at times clashing ones, but always fruitful, with various foreign countries: Spain first and above all, Morocco and the Congo later, have played an important role in the slow flowering of Luc Peire's personality and talent. The "arguments" contributing to this belong to the realm of style. In the course of this transitional period, the artist became strangely conscious of the attraction which the straight line exerted on him and of the numerous expressive possibilities that it could offer. The vertical line satisfied his desire for style and corresponded to his passion.

What rises is severe, even and sovereign — in contrast to everything that opens, spreads and becomes lost in space. The ascending movement has at the same time an intensity which is not undisciplined but definitely oriented toward a certain objective. This is at least the way Luc Peire felt and interpreted the language of the vertical.

After 1949, the neck of a bottle, a slender vase, an easel, behind the figure of a seated woman, were the still hesitant symbols of his nostalgia for height. But his dream was to assume a precise form when in Katanga he saw the tall figures and the proud bearing of the Wattutsi women. Their noble and slender stature was a stirring concretization of his aesthetic aspirations. Thus it was the figure of a black woman, sensual but reserved, that was to put the painter on an artistic path which was to become progressively simplified and from which he was never to depart. With her, too, a sensuality comes into his work which, after 1950, was to reappear, in a latent form, in his abstract works and contribute to give them their accent of human truth. But let us not anticipate.

In discovering the slim silhouette of the Katangese woman, with her tiny head, her small pointed breasts and especially her long slender legs, Peire had found the formal motive for his work. This motive was to become progressively metamorphosed into increasingly simple geometric figures: manikin, vase, narrow rectangle, prism. The coloring of the motive has become restricted while its lighting has become increasingly sharp and subtle. The geometric plane, at times narrowed to a very fine line, the colors as they come out of the tube, but juxtaposed with refinement, a tender spring light — such are the three essential elements of Luc Peire's art about 1958.

When we examine the lighting of Peire's canvases we perceive that he first felt paradoxically attracted by a night light: in order to make light more perceptible, the painter excludes it. This is in canvases where he had nevertheless arranged contrasts of the finest decorative effect: violet contrasting with black and blue; canvases belonging to a period in which Peire painted many geometrically constructed still lifes. Later, light was first and foremost a means for him to suggest depth and space. He then represents a vast studio containing only a few manikins similar to those in department-store window displays, with a half-open door, through which a ray of light, cutting as a razor's edge, penetrates. In later canvases, the suggestion of depth vanishes and the light is resolved into the even



warmth of yellow or into the lustre of an intense white. Soon the only formal elements to subsist, beneath this lighting, were the decanted figure of the Wattutsi woman, and finally the narrow rectangle.

A work like *Mwindi Mingi*, the first of the impressive series of works reproduced here, marks the endpoint of all the experiments we have referred to. But it might just as readily be thought to have been painted at the beginning of the artist's wholly abstract period. Although it is entirely conveyed in a single geometric figure, the tall woman's silhouette preserves its full power of concrete evocation. The pattern of lines and colors has been minutely decanted, but it

nevertheless remains complex. Which amounts to saying that the work in question is not entirely detached from reality. But it may very well be that Peire will never come to this.

In the end, the Wattutsi woman or the manikin were to become nothing more than a vertical line, topped by a circle, or a small balloon attached to a string, and delicate colored. When the geometric motif in turn disappeared, the canvas no longer offered anything but tall elongated surfaces, completed by an ingenious pattern of vertical lines and planes, by a horizon and by a few obliques at times suggesting a depth or, in any case, an idea of a break in the harmonious



130.

Luc PEIRE  
Sun, 1958, 150 x 180, oil on linen.  
Private collection.

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131.  
Luc PEIRE  
*Re-invention*, 1961  
50 x 65, oil on linen.  
Private collection.

whole evoked by the ascending elements. What remained, above all, was color, which was now given full play. While the artist manipulated the lines, like a regular and familiar keyboard — there is no continual invention of ever-new geometric forms, as in the case of Bertrand, but an intelligent juxtaposition of practically immutable formal elements — the experiments in the field of color were to continue indefatigably. As the dramatic tension, already noticed in the figurative work of the young Peire, has by no means diminished, the experiments in the matter of color are chiefly based on oppositions. In the austere *Graphies* dated 1958, the volumes of an even black,

or black with a slight admixture of brown, are applied to a perfectly white background. In a canvas like *Lutèce*, a dazzling red is contrasted with a very tender green. In *Solitude*, the radiations of the black, the gray and the white testify both to a great refinement and to a great tension. A contrast between blood-red on the one hand and dark gray and black on the other dominates *Marcinelle*. In the canvas entitled *Sol*, we see the unexpected introduction of orange yellow contrasting with the purest black.

Except in *Marcinelle*, Luc Peire generally uses a slightly shiny finish. This shininess imparts to the colors, however subdued, a warm tenderness. Although the



painter's art belongs to constructivist abstraction, he is at no time dry or cold. He communicates a gentle affectionateness beneath which the sensuality we have mentioned can be sensed. This comes out very clearly in the fine works here reproduced. They have the warmth, but also the sparkling brightness and the linear sharpness of a summer morning.

Wölfflin has taught us that any consideration of works in the field of the plastic arts requires an attentive study of their style. We have done our best to

define the variations of style and the formal characteristics of Luc Peire's work, and we have endeavored as well to give them the full importance that they assume precisely from the point of view of style.

But even in as brief an analysis as ours an essential link would be missing if we did not look for the source of the various figures of the pictorial style through which Luc Peire addresses us. We shall thus note with pleasure that few painters have influenced this "West-Fleming", who has sought most of the elements of



132.

LUC PEIRE  
Lutèce, 1960, 130 x 162, oil on linen.  
Private collection.

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his style in the nature of the beings and the things that have surrounded him. That he has sorted them out is obvious. But does not the fact that he has always sought his inspiration in the life surrounding him prove the importance that life has had in his abstract work? And the choice that makes an artist adopt a given form rather than another, among the innumerable ones available to him, expresses his preferences in each canvas, as it also communicates his artistic and eclectic passions.

Thus are opposed the two characteristics of Peire's work: he finds his inspiration in what nature offers him, but of this offer he retains only what his personality chooses.

We lack space to analyze in detail these two constants of Peire's work. If we try, in broad strokes, to describe the first, we shall observe that in his early work the artist took his starting point in the expressionist characteristics of nature. However studied his composition was at that period, the portraits, the still lifes and especially the landscapes struck one by their dramatic tension and their lyricism. In the course of his period of transition, the artist felt drawn by the enigmatic atmosphere of night, by the tall stature of silent women, by empty spaces. His work at that time presented a certain kinship of style — though not an identity — with that of Giorgio de Chirico: the contrasted lighting and the oblique lines.

For the present period, the titles of the canvases are very revealing. They indicate a sentiment, evoke some city or refer to some definite point in the vast world. For Luc Peire, as a matter of fact, a city or a region is above all a sentiment and it seems to be true that he owes the finest moments in his life to a few privileged spots. To evoke them he does not resort to any figurative detail, but through the subtle pattern of lines and colors transmits the emotion felt in their presence. In other words, the subject-matter of his work is not the world's formal aspect, but the impression made by the world on his sensibility. This emphasizes the human note in his work, and brings us back to our second observation, which concerns the choice that is at the origin of each of the artist's canvases.

This choice, which is never an aesthetic one, even in the highest sense of the word, is based on the human. For in each one of his works the painter tries to bear witness to what is noblest in man: an unlimited need of poetry, of human warmth, of delicate sensuality and a profound yearning for metaphysical and almost mystical serenity.

To put it in still another way, it might be said that Luc Peire's art is the lyrical reaction of a man confronted with the outer world, and that this reaction is the clearest proof of what the artist can do and of what the man is. No work could better illustrate our point than the one bearing the title *Marcinelle*, the masterpiece reproduced here on a double page. The Walloon village of Marcinelle, it will be remembered, was the scene of a mining disaster in 1958 which cost the lives of 56 miners. Sharing the sentiments of grief-stricken sympathy and outrage that we felt at the news of this catastrophe, Peire expressed them through an uncompromising contrast of red and black against a gray background. The colors of blood, of death and of the dust that in the end covers everything. Passionate and austere — in the Spanish manner — Luc Peire applies these colors, not in wild and desperate forms activated by a savage eruption as on the canvas of Lacasse treating the same subject, but in closed and severely geometric planes. Thus conceived, Peire's work provokes in the spectator a shudder of horror in spite of its unlabored simplicity: it contains no facile effect, no pathos in the arrangement of the forms or the tonality of the colors. In a work like this all the master's qualities are combined: his controlled passion, his deep sensitivity, his great faculty for conveying emotion and translating a human fact, charged with the feelings to which it has given rise, producing a pictorial fact that moves us by a style having an admirable ease.

#### DE MAEGD, JOS

Born in Uden (Netherlands) April 14, 1917. Studied at the University of Louvain and at the Institut Saint-Luc in the same town. Subsequently at the Higher Institute of Fine Arts in Antwerp.

Prix de Rome in 1946. Teacher at the Saint-Luc Institute, in Brussels, and at the Academy of Fine Arts in Louvain.

Exhibitions in Brussels and Antwerp. — Author of numerous writings on the plastic arts.

#### VAN ANDERLECHT, ENGLEBERT

Born in Brussels in 1918. Died in Brussels, March 7, 1961. Studies at the Academy of Brussels.

First one-man show December 20, 1957, at the Galerie Edmond Carabin, with a preface by Maurits Biltcke. — May 1959: One-man show at the Hessenhuis in Antwerp, with introduction by Jean Dyréau. — October 1959: Exhibited, with Vandercam and Dyréau, in the *Peinture partagée* at





133.  
Luc PEIRE  
Marcinelle, 1956  
194 x 247, oil on linen  
Private collection.

the Galerie Aujourd'hui in Brussels. On this occasion, the three artists published a manifesto, signed J(ean) Dypréau. Van Anderlecht renewed the experiment of the peinture partagée with the Antwerp artist Jef Verheyen. — October 1960 : Group exhibit at the Galerie C.A.W. in Antwerp by the Nieuwe Vlaamse School group. — July 1960 : Group exhibit with Fontana, Crippa, Samona, Swan and Peeters at the Galerie Bernard in Grenchen, Switzerland. In the invitation, Van Anderlecht is presented by Jean Dypréau. — Single-artist show at the same gallery in October 1961, with a presentation by Jean Dypréau and texts by Van Anderlecht himself. — December 1960 : Exhibit with Drybergh and Gentils at the Galerie Le Zodiaque in Brussels.

BIBLIOGRAPHY : Maurits Bilcke, « De Gazet van Antwerpen », December 21, 1960. — « De Vlaamse Gids », No. 8, 1961. — Philippe d'Aarschot, « Nul », No. 4, 1962. — E. Van Anderlecht, Catalogue of the exhibit at the Bernard Gallery at Solothurn, Switzerland, 1962.

ENGLEBERT VAN ANDERLECHT was, among Flemish painters of the last ten years, the outstanding "fiery temperament." It was only after his death, however, that the violence of his abstract expressionism was fully understood: it then appeared that his canvases were nothing less than the disconcerting X-rays of a dramatic life wholly dedicated to painting.

It took Van Anderlecht a long time to break entirely with "the old man" he had in him. It took him, in fact, some fifteen years to study himself and explore his relations with painting. Isolated from artistic circles, displaying a stubborn tenacity, he piled up, one after another, in a corner where he would forget them, the fruits of his experiments and his efforts. Torn for years between hope and despair, he struggled agonizingly before he was able, on the ruins of self-destruction, of renunciation and self-denial, to build the monument of a liberated art in which he was at last to assert himself. In 1955, in connection with his submission for the Prix de la Jeune Peinture Belge, we wrote : "Van Anderlecht paints his canvases with a savage brush. He cares little about form and his preferences are for the largest formats. On these, great strokes clash, slashing over one another with wild gestures." This gigantism, not much in evidence among the painters of the period, has certainly influenced talented young artists, like Paul Antoine, for example.

"As a result of his new contacts with artistic life, Van Anderlecht's hopes and confidence revived. He wrote us in March 1957 : "To the artist who perseveres in a solitary effort to express himself, your testimony brings courage and confidence." The words "to express himself" are typical, and deserve to be stressed.

Van Anderlecht, shortly after this, took the risk of organizing a one-man show. The vernissage which was held on December 20, 1957, attracted few people to Edmond Carabain's small gallery. It was nevertheless an event.

What premonition made us write, in the introduction to the catalogue, this significant sentence : "Each canvas has its own form because it springs from a unique adventure, and we might almost say a very personal drama" ? For Van Anderlecht, at least, this first exhibit had a great importance. In a letter which he wrote on December 24th, we read : "I was ill-prepared to present my paintings... My mind was cluttered with so many uncertainties... We chose the impenetrable way... Detecting some depth of feeling in my paintings... The heart in all its violence."

Scarcely a year later, in May 1959, the artist exhibited in the famous Hessenhuis in Antwerp. On this occasion Jean Dypréau speaks of Van Anderlecht's canvases as "dramatic figures, indubitable signs of revolt," and he adds that it is "in order to explore his own personality that Van Anderlecht undertook to paint. Whence that need of great surfaces, those debauches of color, those attacks that the frame of the painting can barely contain." In June 1959, Vandercam and Dotremont exhibited their mud sculptures presenting improvised texts which had been inscribed in them before they were fired. Did this experiment suggest to Vandercam the idea of collaborating with a painter and a poet-critic ?

A few days before the vernissage of the exhibition Shared Painting : Dypréau-Van Anderlecht-Vandercam at the Galerie Aujourd'hui, we could read in the manifesto published on this occasion : "We might recall here how the Orient and the Occident tried to reconcile these two signs : that of the painter and that of the commentator or the poet. But today the problem presents itself in a different way : what we have is not only the meeting of two gestures, but also the opposition of two signs, a conflict... Is it possible to find a common ground between a determined writing sign and an undetermined painting sign ?"

"We are here in the presence of a duel, in fact, of a combat, in which three adversaries face one another. It is neither victory nor defeat that excites us. But the battle itself, with its elegance and its drama : individual freedom and collective effort." The exhibition was assuming the character of a provocation, if only by the titles of its canvases : *Call to Disorder*, *Tribute to the Unknown Deserter*, *Draw Your Life*, *At Life's Zenith* : *Vertigo*, etc. Van Anderlecht was later to repeat the experiment of "shared painting," this time with Jef Verheyen. In October 1960, he exhibited at the Galerie Bernard, in Grenchen, Switzerland. One sentence — the last — in Jean Dypréau's introduction deserves especially to be recalled : "Art is a secret exhibitionism."





134.  
Englebert VAN ANDERLECHT  
Painting 2, 1960  
155 x 123, oil on linen.  
Private collection.



The invitation contained a text by the artist himself. We reproduce it here because it sheds light on the painter's personality: "The object. It is all humanity that makes our painting: by its obsessive questions, it forces us to sketch an image of its destiny. Passions and instincts engender crime... and my canvases. Forms and colors as such cannot quench my hunger. Let them grow until they become a wound. Enough talk about art. We speak well only of what we love. And when we really love, we remain silent."

The wound... VanAnderlecht himself inflicted wounds on some of his canvases. I am thinking in particular of the canvas "Couper la parole", deliberately cut and slashed. But the wound was also elsewhere: the artist's health was deteriorating alarmingly. Nevertheless, he again took part, with Drybergh and Gentils, in an exhibition at the Galerie Le Zodiaque, in December 1960. The canvases exhibited made a strange impression on us: our subconscious surely gave us a hint as to the drama involved. But we could of course not gauge the full import of what we wrote in the "Gazet van Antwerpen" of December 21st: "With Van Anderlecht, finally, the whole orchestra blares forth unrestrainedly in an unbelievable tempest. Rhythm and violence, sound and movement, light and raw color: the spectacular act. And then, all of a sudden, one lingers before a canvas composed entirely in black and white, a pause of wonderful sensitivity between two frenzied gestures, between two desperate convulsions of a painter carried away, body and soul, by his reckless undertaking and determined to pay for it with his life, if need be. Or must we see in them an indestructible vital urge, so painful and so moving in its sincerity that any words here seem out of place?"

Two months later, Van Anderlecht was no more. We lost in him a man who was good and noble, a remarkable painter.

Professor Argan stated, at the time of the deliberation for the Olivetti prize that was posthumously bestowed on Van Anderlecht: "He stimulated young artists to push the pictorial adventure to its last limits. The moving example of Van Anderlecht soon became the symbol of total commitment, of the desire to exceed oneself, of the 'actualization' of painting."

#### DE CLERCQ, MAURICE

Born in Ghent in 1918. Student at the Athénée Royal of his native town. Secondary school teacher. Member of La Nouvelle Ecole Européenne.

1957: First one-man show at the Galerie Parnasse in Ghent. — One-man shows at the Hessenhuis in Antwerp, in 1959 and 1960, at the Galerie Les Contemporains in Brussels in 1960 and at the Gallery Le Soleil dans la Tête in Paris and at the t' Venster Gallery in Rotterdam in 1961.

BIBLIOGRAPHY: Maurits Bilcke, « Scherven », 1st year, No. 1, February 1959. « Sens Plastique », Paris, June 1960. — Jean-Jacques Levêque, Introduction à l'exposition Le Soleil dans la Tête, Paris, June 1960. — Ivo Michiels, Introduction à l'exposition Hessenhuis, Antwerp, July 1959. — Willy Roggeman, « Vooruit », Ghent, May 12, 1960. — Henri Chopin « Cinquième Saison », Paris, No. 12, 1961. — Jos. Murex, « Vooruit », Ghent, March 15, 1958. — Marie de Vivier, « La Flandre Libérale », June 10, 1961

MAURICE DE CLERCQ, in his first abstract works, attracts our attention by the repetition and the development of a theme which reminds us of dead roots, stripped branches, and dried bones. In emptying these forms of their reality, he achieves a very subtle abstract art, and one which is executed with a new material. As in Mackowiak's compositions, a bit of cloth is applied unevenly on a background. The relief of the folds forms the rhythmic theme of this concrete composition. A coat of gray monochrome, sometimes almost black, is mixed with other gritty materials and affords the light an exceptional opportunity to metamorphose the canvas by accentuating the relief and giving life to the cosmic space thus suggested.

#### HOLLEY, FRANCINE

Born in Liège, in 1919, by the name of Trassenster. A student at the Academy of Fine Arts of the city. In 1947 married the French architect Michel Holley and settled in Paris. Frequented the studios of Lhote, Léger, Dewasne and Pillet.

Participated in the Salon des Réalités Nouvelles from 1951 to 1954. — Later became a member of the Belgian Art Abstrait group, with which she exhibited in Brussels, Aix-la-Chapelle, Milan, etc. — Single-artists shows, mostly in Liège. — Executed a mural decoration in ceramics at the Ecole Aéronavale of Ville-d'Avray (1962).

FRANCINE HOLLEY pursues her own chosen path with a natural reserve, out of touch with the circles in which reputations are made. She first did her apprenticeship in landscape and portrait painting, and then, like so many others in her generation, she perceived, in 1946, the attraction and the necessity of plastic unrealism as





135.  
Englebert VAN ANDERLECHT  
Blue painting 101, 1960  
130 x 101, oil on linen.  
Mrs. Van Anderlecht collection, Brussels.



the example of Manessier and Bazaine, of Tal Coat and Marchand was then propagating it in Belgium. The teaching she received in Paris induced her to accord preference to the spirit of geometry (1950). Such is the aspect that her work assumes in the albums of silk-screen prints published between 1953 and 1956 in Brussels by the Art Abstrait group: immobilized sign-forms in smooth and entire tones distributed against a monochrome background at first, and later invented structures fixed in precise and linear contours.

Francine Holley was careful not to let herself become imprisoned in the patterns of a frozen equilibrium. She assimilated the spirit of this discipline only in order to make use of it more freely later. Thus, after 1958, we see the applications of a rigidly organized polychromy being succeeded by more flexible compositions whose orderly lines become integrated in calm black and white relations. While thus moving away from geometric impassibility, she avoids letting herself be drawn into tortured and bristling expressions. And while she reintroduces color in the latest swings of her evolution, it is distributed in a less arid range, with a more sensitive touch, determined by a harmony between sensibility and reason. And it can be said that in her work moderation has become a guarantee and a stimulant that invite her to explore the resources of the non-figured with measure, discretion and firmness.

## GENTILS, VIC

Born in Ilfracombe (Great Britain) May 18, 1919. Studied at the Academy and at the Advanced Institute of Fine Arts of Antwerp.

Co-founder of the G 58 and Nieuwe Vlaamse School groups.

Exhibitions in Antwerp, Brussels, The Hague, Schiedam and Grenchen.

While VIC GENTILS's canvases were hardly successful, his reliefs composed of beams, boards and frames juxtaposed possess an unusual appeal. These structures may of course be considered to belong to the realm of sculpture since they are executed in wood and have a form that definitely stands out in space. But they belong at the same time to painting since their materials are

applied to a panel and the whole includes several tonalities. The colors of the wood, having all the shades of brown and black, are as eloquent as the formal combinations connecting the wooden elements together.

By their sombre aspect these works somewhat suggest medieval strongholds. Adriaan de Roover has written, with considerable justice, that this is an essentially religious art. Paradoxical though it may appear, these strange assemblages of boards and beams exert a hold on the viewer "obscure as an oracle, anguishing as a primitive spell". In other works, however, Vic Gentils shows a less sombre side and strikes a brighter note. And it is in these lighter works that he more fully reveals himself as a poet in the realm of inanimate matter.

Among the many artists who since Vic Gentils — and before him, since Burri and Nevelson — have constructed wood reliefs, we must not fail to mention L. Matthijs. This Brussels artist brightens his structures with a few touches of light and thus suggests the sensation of twilight mysteriously invading a forest. He develops the same theme in his rather dull canvases.

## HACCURIA, MAURICE

Born in Goyer-lez-Corswarem in 1919. 1938 : Devoted himself to painting after having finished normal school. Self-taught.

1943 : Made his debut at the Salon de l'Art Jeune in Brussels. Still lifes influenced by cubism. — 1945 : Settled in Aarschot. — 1951 : First one-man show at Geert Van Bruane's Gallery in Brussels. — 1953 : Single-artist show at the Au Cheval de Verre Gallery in Brussels. — 1957 : First abstract works. — 1961 : First stone sculptures. — Exhibitions : Second International Triennial of Graphic Art at Grenchen (Switzerland), Fourth International Biennial of Graphic Art at Ljubiana (Yugoslavia), Eleven Artists of the Nouvelle Ecole Européenne at the Il Canale Gallery in Venice, and Prix Suisse de Peinture abstraite exhibit in 1961.

MAURICE HACCURIA's outstanding characteristic is a very personal plastic rhythm and an original harmony between form and color. He achieves these by presenting in most of his works a kind of sun, black and irregular, from which capricious lines fly out, together with spots that spread over the whole canvas. The color,





136.  
Francine HOLLEY  
Collage, 1961, 64 x 49  
The artist collection.

regarded as paint quality, also plays an important role through the oppositions between smooth and grained surfaces, between the mat and the shiny parts. Haccuria has a great wealth of chromatic themes at his disposal, based on a perfectly coherent, solid, and balanced plan. The theme hovers in a brightly colored space of seductive softness and depth. The contrasts between the warm and cold tonalities testify to an uncommon creative vigor, as well as to an optimism which nothing alters and to exuberant health. A canvas by Haccuria can always be discerned at first glance among many others.

## DORCHY, HENRY

Born in Tournai in 1920. Son of the draftsman-caricaturist Hubert Dorchy. University studies in History and History of art in Brussels and Liège, Author, in this connection, of a textbook, « Histoire des Belges ». Was attracted early to painting, taught himself, encouraged to do so by his elder, Creten George.

Has exhibited since 1951 in Brussels where he lives. — Study sojourn in Italy in 1955. — In 1960 took part in the Biennial of the Black and White group in Lugano and in 1962 in the Belgian section of the Venice Biennial. — His works are in several collections and in Belgian and foreign museums.

Wishing to launch into the present-day forms of artistic language, HENRY DORCHY began by taking liberties with natural data and giving them stylized, at times very far-reaching transpositions, in response to the seduction of the abstract. The cycles of the *Marine forms* (1955), of the *Impressions of Italy* (1957), of the *Butterflies* (1959) are significant in this respect. This repertory, based on a rigorous discipline in composition whose means of plastic expression he was anxious to diversify, was matched by technical experiments which reveal a fine understanding of the craft : the use of latex paints, then of transparent oil varnish on aluminum sheets. In its present direction, his painting is characterized by a dynamic impulse, essentially non-objective in its elements, whose active freedom contributes to the enhancement of the brilliant velvety-ness of the oil varnishes, of the diffraction of their luminous effects on the metal especially. And it can be said that Dorchy is committed to constantly challenging the methods of his art, to which his creative energies are now wholly devoted.

## CARLIER, MARIE

Born in Berchem-lez-Anvers in 1920. Studied at the Academy and the Institute of Fine Arts of Antwerp from 1937 to 1944, then at the Ecole nationale supérieure d'architecture et des arts décoratifs (E.N.S.A.A.D.) in Brussels until 1949.

Devoted herself to graphic arts before taking up painting in the course of a study sojourn in Copenhagen in 1958.

Individual exhibitions in Brussels since 1952. Joined the Phases movement in 1958.

The signs of an evolution progressively less dependent on realistic interpretation are to be discerned in MARIE CARLIER's engravings and drawings. When she took up painting this transformation found expression in imaginary landscapes whose titles, like those of Lacomblez and Zimmermann, reveal very clear symbolic intentions. At first fantastic evocations developed in the midst of a spectral flux which determined the general movement of the lighting. Then smooth and brilliant colorations animated this dream atmosphere with expansive radiations which reached into the distance and brought out suggestions of a strange other world. While it is obvious that the legend of the inner world in which Marie Carlier makes herself at home constitutes an intrusion into *Phantasmagic* and the sentimental exploration of the marvellous, it is equally apparent that the possibilities opened up by abstraction have played an important role in determining the direction of her work.

## MARA, POL

Born in Antwerp in 1920. Studied at the Academy, and then at the Advanced Institute of Fine Arts of this city. (W. Vaes's class).

Has taken part, since 1949, in numerous group shows in Belgium and abroad. — First one-man show in 1952. — Was represented, in particular, at the Biennial of Drawing (San Reggio, 1955), at the International Exhibition of Black and White (Lugano, 1956), at the São Paulo Biennial (1957), at the Lissone (1955), Marzotto (1960), and Guggenheim Prize (1960) Exhibitions, as well as at the Comparaison Salon (Paris, 1959), at the Tokyo Biennial (1961), and at the International Exhibition of the Carnegie Institute in Pittsburg (1961). — Travels in France, Spain, Italy and Greece. — Sojourn in Murs (Vaucluse) from April to July 1962. — Works in private collections in Belgium, Netherlands, Paris, Brazil, U.S.A., etc.

BIBLIOGRAPHY : Francine-C. Legrand, « Quadrum », Brussels, No. 6, April 1959. — L.-L. Sosset, « Les Beaux-Arts », Brussels, April 11, 1960. — Marc Callewaert, « Art d'Aujourd'hui », Paris, December 1960.





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Pol MARA  
Painting III, 1960  
146 x 114, oil on linen.  
Private collection.



138.  
Pol MARA  
To Dimitseana, 1961-1962  
236 x 132, oil on linen.  
The artist collection.



Drawings on colored backgrounds, gouaches in great number, and then paintings in wax revealed POL MARA's inventive and spontaneous inspiration already in 1952. Frail elongated silhouettes, with moon heads, engaged in witty pantomimes in which irony blended unobtrusively with mystery, and poetry with dream, such was the discreet entrance upon the scene of this artist whose sensational mutations were to lead to the opulent flows of color that characterize his canvases of recent years.

In the very first works that he showed could be discerned an awakening of freedom propitious to the further ventures of inner discovery. He had just broken away from a conventional mannerism which had been for him nothing more than an exercise in the appropriation of technique. In the sinuous contours and the fluttering ellipses of the line, a style — narrative in essence, to be sure, but at a far remove from the registers of realism — gave itself free rein. The sign-image took on a mischievous originality in the strange airy roundnesses of the graphic interlacings, and during the years that followed it became clear that Mara, with this little floating world, had settled in a climate of psychic improvisation which had certain affinities with the humor and the manifestations of malice that were the stock-in-trade of surrealism.

Until 1957 his mind concentrated on these diverting evocations projected in a perpetual going back and forth from the conscious to the unconscious, in an ingenuous disguise of filiform circumvolutions gliding lightly on the surface of life. He was trying to catch not only the fugitive and subjective notations of the unexpected but also the form associated with their message, without any other apparent intention than to play with drawing and color in order the better to liberate himself from the formulas and to shake down the routinist techniques he had been taught.

Then suddenly the curves swelled, amplified their orb, accentuated their presence to the point of camouflaging the structure of the reminiscences represented. Inspiration no longer found its impetus in the detail of linear interpretation but in the gyrating movements imparted to the colored substance. Overcoming all timidity, Mara appealed to the jolting rhythms, to the ardent tones, to the dynamic developments that devour the contours and identify them with rotating space. His secret temperament participated more and more in the execution, to such a point that the last suggestions of the external world were gradually absorbed by the morphology of a spiral whirl.

Since 1959, his color has broken up into trembling eddies in a series of wax water-colors which soon made their influence felt in the paintings. Mara's lyricism was now based exclusively on aggregates of pot-bellied spots, tempered by circular modulations and peripheral inflections, whose swarming freedom of deployment represents the ultimate expression of baroque sensibility. A confused, exuberant palpitation passes through these dazzling and delicately shaded works, in which the colored waves rise, bend over, twist and tear in whirling movements. Moreover, Mara proves himself to be very much of a colorist in his search for composite polychrome effects in which the grave and the acute, the melodic and the discordant interpenetrate, combine, amalgamate with a turbulent assurance.

The end of 1960 marks a new period in Mara's evolution. In a calmer mood, he adopted a denser and firmer chromatic grouping. The intentional dispersion of lines gives way to broad areas of vertical upward thrusts composed of three or four vibrant tones, whose plastic monumentality and fullness of expansion are already an achievement of maturity. A trip to Greece and to the Cyclades seems to have determined this deliberately sustained simplification of color and this sudden domination of instinct.

Thus Mara's circular whirls have become transformed into calm reserves of energy. What a long road he has traveled from the delicate anecdotic suggestions of more than ten years ago which naturally called for the small format and these robust compositions upon which the great surfaces confer such a remarkable ardor ! We may wonder what further transformations we can still look forward to, now that the artist has become convinced that there is no final solution in art and that he has proved to us that the vitality and the high level of his talent reveal themselves in the candor of his renewals.

#### BOGAERT, ANDRE

Born in Zele-Durmen, April 7, 1920. A student at the Termonde Academy of Fine Arts, at the Institut Supérieur des beaux-arts of Antwerp and at the Art Schools of Düsseldorf and Munich.

Exhibitions in Antwerp, Ghent, Liège, Rotterdam, Milan and London.

Although ANDRE BOGAERT is a rather minor figure in contemporary Flemish art, his work is known and appreciated in enlightened circles of art lovers. Bogaert, whose craftsmanship has been rewarded by important prizes in painting, is an artist whose works tend to bear a strong imprint of spirituality. As a child he was strongly drawn to Christian mysticism, and to the mystery of space. The problem of light became later a third subject of interest.

As an abstract painter, he has had up to now two important periods of activity. In the course of the first, his canvases represent a kind of space without form or light, an impenetrable and anguishing space. At present he allows a cathedral light to penetrate between columns of darkness: with a very sure hand he juxtaposes various parts of the canvas with bright and dark tonalities, producing effects that are both sensitive and evocative. The colors are kept within the range of the grays, giving one the feeling that the artist is attempting to achieve the discreet charm of engraving rather than the vigor of painting. Thus is born a spiritual climate which, without ever being accentuated, always justifies itself from the plastic and pictorial point of view.

## DE SAUVAGE, GUY

Born in Brussels in 1921. Self-taught in art.

Practiced ceramics from 1950 to 1954. then painting. — Travels to France, Spain, Italy, Switzerland, Germany, Netherlands. — Has lived alternately in Brussels and in Paris since 1959. — Is indebted to the Frenchman Messiaen for the « spatio-luminism » of which his paintings carry suggestions.

## WELLES, FLORENT

Born in Anderlecht March 3, 1921. Self-taught.

Exhibitions in Brussels in 1949, 1961 and 1962. — Contributed to the reviews « Cobra », « Tijd en Mens » and « Architecture ».

BIBLIOGRAPHY : Jan Walravens, « Rondom Florent Welles », in « Kroniek van Kunst en Kultuur », May 1961.

The production of FLORENT WELLES, sculptor and draftsman, is limited, but marked by an undeniable poetic quality. As a sculptor he executes mostly unusual elongated figures in wood or plaster. As a draftsman, his preference goes to rigid, geometric lines, vaguely reminiscent of human figures, against a glazed background. The pattern of lines, austere bare, is often contrasted with a sphere, red as a setting winter sun. The opposition between the two geometric figures produces a strange tension.

In other drawings, done with a freer, more flexible technique, a pattern of shadows and mists is accentuated by means of light touches of watercolor. Here again it is above all the sensation of the unusual that holds the attention.

## TESZLAK, ALBERT

Born in Budapest July 6, 1921. Studied at the Advanced Institute of Decorative arts (jewelry) in his native city. 1948 : Emigrated to Belgium. 1949 : First paintings. Studied at the Brussels Academy.

1950 : First exhibitions : Namur, Verviers, Brussels. — Has exhibited regularly at the Contemporains Gallery in Brussels.

BIBLIOGRAPHY : R.-M. Thomas, « La Dernière Heure », March 2, 1957. — Urbain van de Voorde, « De Standaard », March 1, 1957. — X., « L'Avenir du Tournais », March 16, 1957. — Paul Caso, « Le Soir », February 27, 1957. — Maurits Bilcke, « De Gazet van Antwerpen », February 28, 1957, January 29, 1958, January 6, 1960, December 27, 1961.

## RAVEEL, ROGER

Born in Machelen-sur-Lys, July 15, 1921. Studied at the Ghent Academy of Fine Arts.

Exhibitions in Ghent, Ostend, Brussels and Albirole.

Already in the last of his figurative canvases — inner gardens, fenced-in meadows, leaning figures — ROGER RAVEEL strove for a greater sobriety of planes and an intensification of color, with contrasts between pure



blacks and the rawest whites. The abstract painter has kept this hankering for purity of tones and offers us canvases with immense planes and a color range in which — with the exception of black — neutral tonalities are absent. The composition remains sketchy: an irregular square is fixed, like a window, in the upper or lower part of the canvas. Around it a quantity of unequal planes of color or a savage criss-cross of brush strokes. In other works, columns of color spring up like battling cascades. From time to time a vague figure, an obscure sign emerges. The color is transparent with a predilection for water green, orange or lemon yellow, cloud or vapor white. All these tones are very fresh, sometimes veering toward the acid or crude. The pattern of black lines, as we said above, is almost barbaric. Naturalness predominates. Devoid of reflection, it inspires Raveel either to hasty works or to triumphs which have no parallel in Flemish art.

In any case his paintings have unmistakable affinities with the dynamic and direct American "action painting". As for the problem of light, Raveel does not try to bring it out by the juxtaposition of bright surfaces and projected shadows, but by the suggestive juxtaposition of brightness and more brightness.

All these characteristic traits contribute to make of him a painter of springtime and of youth. And in his best canvases this is what he is, with an overflowing purity. But he can be richer and more complex too. And then he surprises us by his solidity, his maturity and even a certain supersaturation. When his vermillions, his apple greens and his golds burst, he achieves a depth that is almost painful, scarcely bearable.

## ONGENAE, JOSEPH

Born in Antwerp October 17, 1921. After primary school he felt himself drawn to the sailor's adventurous life and remained at sea until 1939. Traveled to the Far East in 1949. A member of La Jeune Peinture Belge.

Settled in Amsterdam in 1950, where he became a founding member of the Liga Nieuwe Beelden. — Made a study trip that same year to New York and Chicago. — Decorating and mural painting in Amsterdam and Schiphol. — Exhibitions in Antwerp, Amsterdam, Milan and Munster.

It was at the age of twenty-five that JOSEPH ONGENAE took up painting. Until then his interests had been

divided between sailing and philosophy, in which he was self-taught. It was especially Picasso's still lifes, expressionistic but rigorously constructed, which attracted him to painting. His first canvases were night scenes which were striking for their authenticity, and won him the Artes prize, given in Antwerp. But they were far from satisfying the young artist, who decided to give up painting.

Not for long, however, for soon he became enthusiastic about pure form, practiced as a superior form of decoration. He saw in it a satisfying and authentic way of embellishing the setting in which modern man lives. This activity, applied to the walls of immense entrance halls, reception rooms, monumental staircases, satisfied his need of action, his love of physical effort and of practical achievements. It also satisfied an apparently contrary need for meditation and contemplation, which Hegel had previously satisfied. Like Piet Mondrian, Ongenae saw in abstract painting a soothing game of combinations and proportions, capable of subtly exalting the spirit. This game, purely intellectual in essence, elevating the artist to spirituality, made it possible to grasp divinity in the magic of its numbers. The work that emerged from this was clear, unaffected, authentic and free of any contingency. It had an ethical value, in the highest sense of the term.

Applied to Ongenae's work, these considerations will obviously appear a little farfetched, for one cannot fail to recognize that in their execution certain canvases by this artist are very similar to those of Mondrian; while others have an affinity with the work of Doesburg. Ongenae even goes so far as to paint, as Mondrian did, on panels in the form of lozenges. But on the other hand, what a difference between Mondrian and Ongenae if we consider their respective personalities as they manifest themselves in their works. Mondrian reveals himself to be more austere than the Antwerp painter, his color is both harder and purer. Ongenae shows more gentleness and in consequence achieves compositions whose poetic intensity is deeper. He introduces into his geometric abstractions tender gray and pale blue tints which are foreign to artists who profess the same theories as he does. In addition, he has applied simplifications which tend in the direction of the supreme bareness of a Malevitch.

Like Mondrian — again — he has been greatly impressed by the dynamic rhythm of the great American cities. The canvas entitled *New York 1957*, reproduced here, proves this with great freshness. In contrast to the deliberately dry linear invention, the color is joyous and

sparkling. This work, full of youthfulness, is the expression of the contagious vitality that Ongenae learned to love among the skyscrapers of Manhattan.

Belonged successively to the Jeune Peinture Belge, Cobra and Art Abstrait movements. — Numerous one-man shows (Brussels, Liège, Paris, London, Milan, Grenchen, etc.) and frequent participation in group exhibitions since 1945. — Has lived since 1960 in Fontenay-aux-Roses.

## CARETTE, FERNAND

Born in Marcinelle December 11, 1921. 1935-1940 : Academic training. 1940-1948 : Figurative works.

1950 : First one-man show. — Then yielded to the lure of adventure. — 1955 : Fresco for the Banque du Congo Belge. — 1960 : Decoration executed on polyester plates for the ceiling of the Bourse de Commerce of Charleroi. — Various exhibits at the Saint-Laurent Gallery in Brussels.

BIBLIOGRAPHY : Maurits Bilcke, « De Gazet van Antwerpen », November 25, 1953, February 23, 1955, March 20, 1957, December 10, 1958, March 29, 1961.

FERNAND CARETTE may be considered as one of the most personal painters of the generation which today has reached the age of forty. Ever unsatisfied, he has tried many paths in his search for the direction he should follow. This explains the variety of his work. There are times when it evokes for a moment an "abstract" Picasso or certain of Atlan's canvases. But the artist's capricious, intransigent, and cross-grained nature everywhere dominates. It is this that marks every one of Carette's canvases with the seal of his originality. Some of his compositions communicate a restrained tenderness, a wholly romantic poetic quality. Yet it is not rare for this too-modest painter to touch us by an unexpected effect, by an instinctive and sudden bold stroke, by a note of deep authenticity. Carette has also executed some remarkable frescoes in which the freshness of the polychrome is in perfect harmony with the playful but restful rhythm of lines and surfaces.

## BURY, POL

Born in Haine-Saint-Pierre (Hainaut) in 1922. After a brief attendance at the Mons Academy of Fine Arts, joined the group Tendances Contemporaines, founded in La Louvière by Hélène Jacquet (1912-1949).

In the present phase of his evolution, POL BURY makes curious automatic objects composed mainly of little metal strips and rods, of open-work surfaces and wire spirals set into motion by an electric current. These fairy-playtoys, mock counterparts of utilitarian objects and having a considerable affinity with the ambiguous manifestations of neo-dadaism, in no way suggest that they were preceded by a promising painting experience on the basis of which we can gauge the acuteness of penetration of his work in the abstract field.

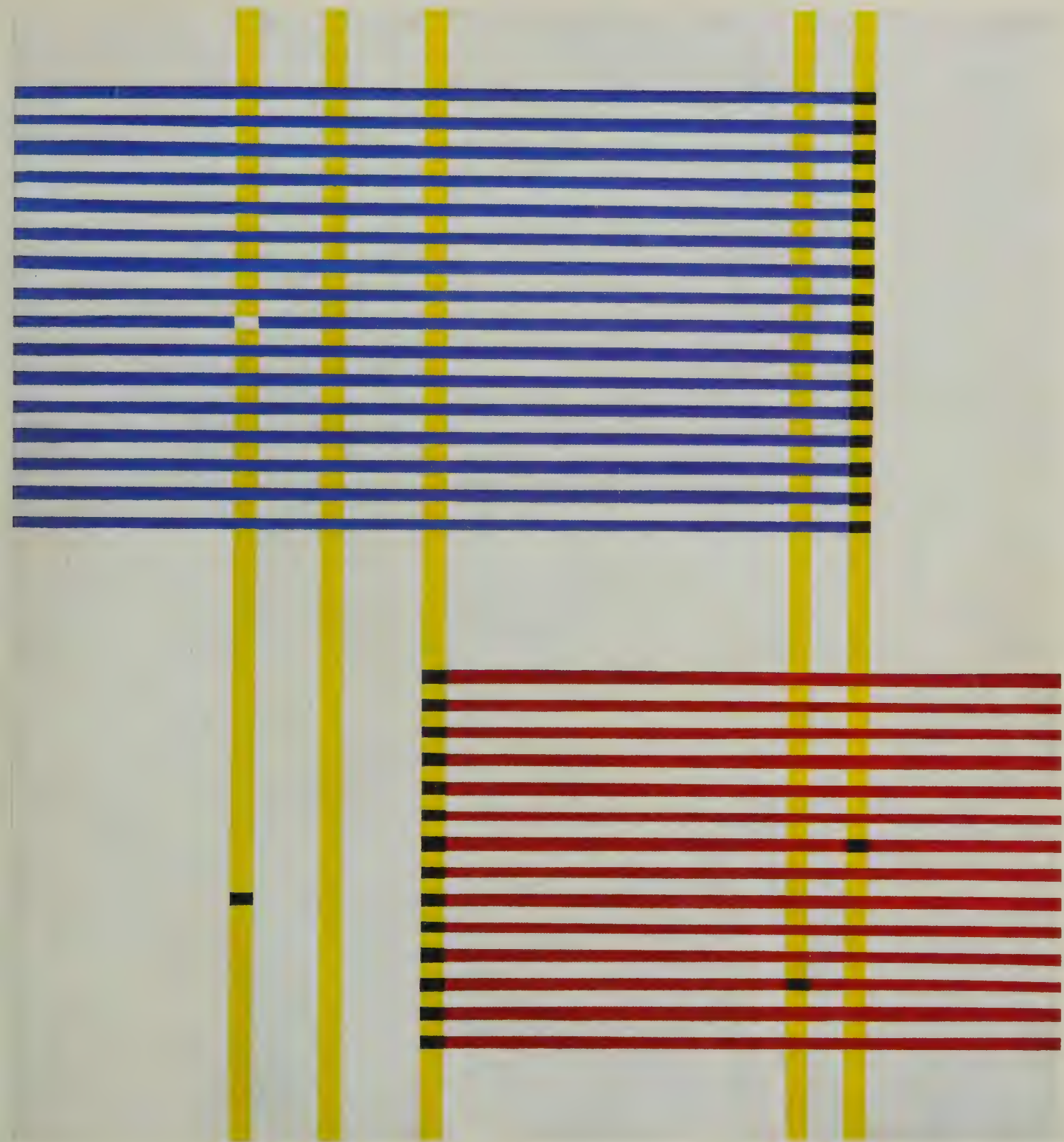
It is within the framework of surrealism, however, that Bury made himself known, in December 1945, in Brussels, as a member of the group which included, in particular, Magritte, Delvaux and Labisse. Under the impact of the emulation created by the Jeune Peinture Belge team, he soon practiced an abstraction rather confused in intention, developed on the basis of a jerky linear style, coated with a gamut of grays, blues and blacks. Little by little his compositions developed in the direction of clarity, became organized into mosaics of colors and arranged in rigorously outlined pure flat tones, in a manner verging on mechanical regularity.

Disinclined to confine himself to a fixed position, he broke away from static rigorism and went in for "mobile planes" or transformable paintings (1953). These were cut-out plates, superposed around an axis in such a way as to produce, by simply rotating these, varied assemblages of colored surfaces. In 1954, he distributed these colored planes in space in the form of small plates arranged on pivoting stems, set in motion electrically.

At this point Bury ceased to interest himself in the pattern of forms and colors to devote himself to optico-mechanical techniques : reliefs, projections, repetitive rhythms, perforated screens animated by lights going on and off, moving wires — all elements used to define an art of movement by their constant gyrations, their irregular oscillations and their quiverings.

The black and white mobile objects and the "erectile entities" of the years 1960-62 amply testify to the fact that these various investigations, carried on in a spirit of fundamental gratuitousness, have favored the revival and the personalization of Bury's artistic experience. But it was as a result of his conversion to the aesthetics of abstraction that he progressively acquired the assurance that he was able to make himself at home in this





139.

Joseph ONGENAE  
New York, 1961, 75 x 70, oil on wood.  
Private collection.

realm which eminently suits his humor, his ingenuity and his witty inventive talent.

## ANTOINE, PAUL

Born in Waltzing (Arlon) February 1, 1922. Classical and technical studies. Artistic and technical training under Albert Philippot. At the age of 30 he attended the classes of Léon Devos (painting), and Jacques Moeschal (sculpture) at the Brussels Academy.

1957 : First one-man show of drawings and paintings at the Galerie Apollo in Brussels. — 1960 : Drawing exhibition at the Galery Le Zodiaque in Brussels. — 1961 : Painting and drawing exhibit at the Helikon Gallery in Hasselt. — 1962 : Exhibition at the Galerie Le Zodiaque, in Brussels.

BIBLIOGRAPHY : Urbain van de Voorde, « De Standaard », March 11, 1957. — André Marc, « La Lanterne », April 1957. — Jan Dessers, « Het Belang van Limburg », October 1, 1961. — Maurits Bilcke, « De Gazet van Antwerpen », November 16, 1960. — Radio Brussels, « Onze Kunstkalender », November 14, 1960. — L.-L. Sosset, « Les Beaux Arts », No. 911. — Paul Antoine, « Over Tekenkunst », Invitation to the exhibit at the Le Zodiaque Gallery, 1960. — « Du Langage pictural » in « La Dryade », No. 21, spring 1960. — Introduction to the catalogue of the exhibition at the Le Zodiaque Gallery, Brussels, 1962.

## DE VOGELAERE, ALPHONSE

Born in Ghent September 12, 1922. Obtained a licence in the history of art and in archeology (University of Ghent). Obtained a diploma to teach drawing in the Secondary Schools. Professor at the Academy of Fine Arts in his native town. — Art critic.

— Exhibitions in Ghent, Antwerp, Brussels, Bruges and Stockholm.

Included for a long time among the artists of merit in the city of Artevelde, ALPHONSE DE VOGELAERE only recently became converted to abstract art, in works which are not entirely detached from nature, but which evoke it through a gently luminous coloration. His layers of color are heightened by various materials and thereby become more concrete. His canvases are distinguished above all for their decorative character.

## LANDUYT, OCTAVE

Born in Ghent December 26, 1922. Studied at the Courtrai Academy of Fine Arts. Professor at the Ghent Normal School and director of the NEWAF Bureau of Design. Belgian Guggenheim prize in 1958. Besides a considerable production as painter and draftsman, he executed designs for fabrics, ceramics, jewels and stage sets.

Exhibitions in Europe and in the United States.

BIBLIOGRAPHY : Remi de Cnodder, « Octave Landuyt » in « De Branding », Antwerp 1959. — Harry Torczyner, « O. Landuyt », Ghent, 1962. — Em. Langui, « Octave Landuyt », in « Quadrum » XII, 1962, Brussels.

In the evolution of modern art it has been noted that around 1960 the figurative and abstract currents join and even combine. It has been noted also that the antagonism that so long opposed them to each other then ceased. The example of Paul Van Hoeydonck illustrates this observation. From a cold and geometric abstraction we see him pass progressively to a spiritualized realism. A new realism, of which the form can still be said to be non-figurative, but which shows us immense spaces of light, sprays of stars turning pale in the first glimmering of dawn, luminous and infinitely shaded drops...

OCTAVE LANDUYT took the opposite path. While it cannot be said that he ends up in abstraction, in the absolute sense of the word, it is nevertheless obvious that his very special realism brought him closer and closer to a pictorial space in which representation is reduced to the point of being scarcely indentifiable. Which means that we witness in him the free creation of a powerful pictorial imagination.

Octave Landuyt's art has always had a very pronounced spiritualist accent. But his spiritualism is so strange that the term "surrealism" was immediately applied to him. This surrealism proceeded rather from the general climate of his works in which small figures, with hypertrophied heads, looked at the viewer with eerie questioning eyes, and not from the coloring or from the contrasting of objects, so dear to René Magritte. Landuyt intensified even further the suggestion of this unwanted and ambiguous climate by the expressionist style of his figures of recumbent men or women, by his fierce cat's heads, by his horrible foetuses and tubercules. It was during this period that the mat tonalities, based mainly on beige, were replaced by deep reds and blues, and that Landuyt gave a sumptuous lustre to his crepuscular coloration.

When the painter began to be actively interested in the surface of things, and recognized in it the essence of what we are — eternal energy, vitality and metamor-





140.  
Octave LANDUYT  
Congealment, 1962, 70 x 80, oil on linen  
Private collection.

phosis — we might say that his painting became phenomenological.

Fascinated by the earth's coarse crust, the artist soon succeeded in representing it in such studied detail and with such a visionary power that one has as much the impression of being confronted with an immensely enlarged photograph as with an abstract canvas. The trees that Landuyt represents, on tall narrow panels, rise gracefully into the sky and seem to have been X-rayed, for one sees both the surface and the veins of the leaves, the bark on the trunks as well as the sap. The canvas is kept down to a very delicate gray color scheme, so that one has the impression of a fine mist falling gently on the branches and transfiguring them into forms not readily recognizable but aristocratic. Or does the tree breathe like a lung, and did the painter want to show us how delicate is the texture of the human skin? Other canvases give us the impression that the artist, with the same poetic sensitivity, is revealing to us the viscera of the human body.

It will be gathered from this description that the climate of strangeness that emanated from certain details of Landuyt's previous works remains present in his more recent canvases. This climate derives just as much from the choice of the figurative subjects as from the spreading of certain colors. We already mentioned that Landuyt shows us what looks like enlarged pictures of human viscera. He manifests a predilection for the innermost surface, the most secret part of an organ: women's vulvas with the labia open and palpitating or gaping flowers, translucent plants. Often combined with this is a love of the macabre: death's heads, drowned people, foetuses. The light projected on these mysteries is intense, well-nigh intolerable. It is suffused with brilliant golds — the gold of very ancient jewels — by night blues, blood reds or grays, incisive and obsessing, heightened by a lunar green. But as we have already observed, all these tonalities well up from the darkness that surrounds them. In Octave Landuyt's art powerful sources of light send forth their brilliance, but the sun is absent from this eminently nocturnal work. It may be that Landuyt's canvases are at times executed with too great virtuosity, that the forms blend too deliberately, that the spiritual atmosphere is created with too great facility from the shocking representation of anatomical details. Nevertheless his works impress their poignant presence upon us. They attract the spirit, they engage it and move it. They also have a demoniacal character. They are constantly being transfigured. We have already mentioned the tree that breathes, like a

lung. The women's vulvas resemble the calyxes of flowers. The old-gold sun swarms like an immense mass of microbes beneath the lens of the microscope. If the imagination lets itself go for a moment, the visible world vanishes, the skin and the tissues that cover reality dissolve, and there remains only the color, which rises, flows and triumphs. Up to the point where the color, in turn, is metamorphosed into dazzling light, a light which is at the basis of Octave Landuyt's most recent experiments. Thus abstraction is reached without the exclusion of nature.

## GROOTERS, JULES

Born in Molenbeek-Saint-Jean December 30, 1922. Attended the courses given by Léon Devos and Anto Carte at the Brussels Academy of Fine Arts.

One-man exhibition in Brussels in 1961.

JULES GROOTERS is fond of walls that are crumbling, with the paint peeling off, soiled and covered with graffiti. Some of his canvases look as if they were exact copies. But looking at them more closely, one perceives how rhythmical the pattern of their lines is — often with prevailing diagonals — and how deliberate and premeditated the apparently happy-go-lucky coloring is. When one sees how balanced Grooters' compositions are, one is scarcely astonished to learn that his previous work, which was essentially cubist, was in the vein of Fernand Léger. One also understands, when one examines the subtle shades of his coloring, that the influence of Kurt Schwitters, that master of delicate tonalities, led him to abstract painting. But Jules Grooters also likes contrasts: a shred of sunlight on a mudpit. Through them he suggests a pictorial space which is his own. A contrast of gold and black against a dazzlingly white background, a streak of colors dripping on the canvas, a whirl of pale pink tints whipped with white lines. These passionate oppositions have something about them that suggests the sumptuousness of Spanish art. Jules Grooters is in the midstream of his evolution, but the power of his artistic temperament is already clearly affirming itself.



## LAMBILLIOTTE, FRANÇOISE

Born in Incourt (Brabant) in 1923. A student at the Academy of Fine Arts of Brussels (painting) and at the Academy of St-Josse (drawing) from 1945 to 1948.

Exhibited for the first time in 1950. — Studied engraving in 1955 in Paris with Germaine Richier. — Very retiring, Françoise Lambilliotte has rarely shown her works.

The character of FRANÇOISE LAMBILLIOTTE's recent paintings, and assuredly the essence of their unreality, can be said to be determined by the emotional freedom, the freshness and the colorful animation they display. A kind of joyousness breathes through the flashes of color and the impulsive movement of their distribution. The evolution that this artist's painting underwent some

ten years ago parallels the passage from figuration to abstraction effected by many young artists who had gone through their apprenticeship in the wake of expressionism and were anxious to break away from the trodden paths. She then felt drawn to exercises of transposition of unreal landscapes, unburdened by their material context, placed in a floating space with broken perspectives, the measure and order of which became crystallized in fleeting graphic indications. They were paintings having about them an air of expectancy — muted tones, muted harmonies, in which tender grays associate with pale ochres, subdued greens, caught by the delicate pattern of scumbles, transparencies, elusive irradiations.



141.  
Françoise LAMBILLIOTTE  
Number 3, 1961, 80 x 100, oil on linen.  
Private collection.





142.  
Georges COLLIGNON  
Hope of shock, 1960  
195 x 130  
oil on linen.  
Private collection.



This silent art has today given way to a painting of lyrical flowering. Enthusiasm vivifies the treatment, models the action, communicates resonances full of alacrity. Françoise Lambilliotte has thus assimilated a certain effusive conception of abstraction — a conception which determines her manner of existing in painting and whose field of expansion is sufficiently broad to enable her to find in it sources of renewal in harmony with the laws of her being.

## COLLIGNON, GEORGES

Born in 1923 in Flémalle-Haute. A student at the Liège Academy of Fine Arts from 1939 to 1945. Became a member of the Jeune Peinture Belge association, then of the Liège section of the Cobra movement.

In 1950 shared with Alechinsky and Dubosc the Jeune Peinture Belge prize when it was awarded for the first time. — Settled in Paris in 1951, his work shown in group exhibitions (Salon de Mai, Réalités Nouvelles, etc.). — One-man shows since 1946 in Liège and Brussels, then in Paris, Frankfurt, New York, Oslo, etc. — Participated in the Carnegie Institute (Pittsburgh, 1952 and 1958), Lissone (1955), Guggenheim (1960) and Marzotto (1960) Prize exhibitions as well as in the São Paulo (1961) and Venice (1962) Biennials. — His works have been acquired by the Museums of Modern Art of Paris and São Paulo, as well as by the Museums of Brussels, Liège and Verviers.

BIBLIOGRAPHY : Francine-C. Legrand, « Quadrum », No. 9, pp. 150/1, Brussels, 1960. — K.-K. Ringström, Preface to the catalogue of the exhibition of the Kaare Berntsen Gallery, Oslo, May 1961. — S. Frigerio, « Art-Témoin », No. 1, Paris, November 1961.

GEORGES COLLIGNON was a long time finding his direction. In 1955 he chose a path which he has made his own, a path whose themes develop into a kind of imaginary topography dominated by the idea of radial asymmetry.

When he first began to paint, after the confinement of the German occupation, he had to surmount the narrow conservatism that dominated the provincial environment in which he had been raised and which remained unaffected by certain impulsive attempts at emancipation. Among these, the A.P.I.A.W. (Association for Artistic and Intellectual Progress of the Walloon Provinces) was trying to publicize, through exhibitions and lectures, the creators of new forms of expression of the Paris school, who were known only to the local elite. Thanks to this initiation, young Collignon acquired the certainty that in order to belong to his time it was important immediately to get away from the academic immobilism that surrounded him.

In the beginning he proved receptive to Picasso, becoming briefly one of his innumerable mannerists. Klee impressed him next, as did Kandinsky and Miro, all very much disparaged by those around him, but the knowledge of whose work brought him artistic emotions which were new to him. It was while he was under their spell that he transposed into his painting his obsession with the spirit of stones, and then made room for denatured elements which betray obvious affinities with the manner of Van Lint. Thus he awakened to the consciousness of a free art, open to creative initiatives and possibilities.

Yet he could not be satisfied to remain an imitator of novelty. Having settled in Paris in 1951, but working alone, he worked for four years to find a valid basis of development for his art. The consciousness of his craft that he later acquired led him to destroy most of the canvases that he executed during this period.

At the end of this period a clearer concept began to emerge, of circular rhythms arranged in irregular combinations of straight lines, curves and counter curves crossing in radiating centers of convergence. Different experiments, which range from constructive arrangement to dynamic impulse, led him to conceive works in which the lines of percussion and the variations in chromatic intensity supported the actions and interactions of an expansive organization. This led him eventually to painting canvases animated by flickering specks and luminous flat tints distributed in complex networks tied together in sheafs of oblique and gyratory trajectories.

In his most recent compositions, Collignon appears to tackle the disciplines of order and bareness, the better to apprehend the sensation of force-forms toward which his style tends. The scattered and profuse aspect of the surface gives way to a more homogeneous and warmer sense of the fundamental data. Which suggests that the artist, having surmounted the handicap of his initial training little by little, is on the point of entering into his full creative phase.

## BERGEN, EMILE

Born in Aarschot July 3, 1923. Student of the Académie des beaux-arts de Louvain, then, in 1950-1952 of the Institut supérieur d'art et d'archéologie de Bruxelles.

1951 : First one-man show (Maison des Loisirs, La Louvière). — 1955 : One-man show at the Galerie Apollo in Brussels. Introduction by Paul Fierens. — Art reviews published his

articles on Max Bill, Albers, Moholy-Nagy, Gropius, Picabia, mural painting, integration of plastic arts, etc.

BIBLIOGRAPHY : Maurits Bilcke, « De Gazet van Antwerpen », December 9, 1933 ; Introduction to the exhibition at the Galerie Saint-Laurent, Brussels, February 1960 ; « De Vlaamse Drukker, April 1960. — Paul Fierens, Introduction to the exhibition at the Galerie Apollo, Brussels, March 1955. — L.-L. Sosset, Introduction for the Galerie Saint-Laurent exhibit, Brussels, December 1953.

## VLERICK, PIERRE

Born in Ghent October 29, 1923. Studied at the Academy of Fine Arts of his native city and at the Grande Chaumière in Paris.

First abstract works about 1948. — Represented at the Museum of Modern Art in Brussels. — Exhibitions in Pittsburgh, Brussels and Ghent.

PIERRE VLERICK claims that Pierre Bonnard, whose retrospective he saw in Paris in 1947, was the painter who exerted the deepest influence on him. While it is easy to imagine what the young artist must have felt in analysing Bonnard's painting, one cannot help thinking that it was rather a meeting of temperaments than a meeting of minds on questions of form. What attracted Vlerick in Bonnard's canvases was not the style but the love of what is delicate and intimate, the dislike of eloquence, the worship of light, the care taken to justify pictorially each touch of color and to apply it discreetly, as in a minor key.

From the strictly formal point of view, Pierre Vlerick owes more to Tal Coat. Not that as a Fleming of good stock Vlerick could dream of evoking abstract beauty or the mysterious expression of a line speeding like an arrow or the milky whiteness of a surface. Even so, in his abstract works certain of these stylistic elements are to be found, as in the canvases invariably entitled *Gardens*, which are above all the abstraction of a perfectly clear reality. This reality is evoked by the extreme fineness of a palette composed of a delicate pink, pale green, a rather pallid white, and also by a pattern of sinuous lines recalling the baroque caprices of the *Jugend-Stil*. In his recent works, Pierre Vlerick seems especially concerned with the problems presented by

light. A light never having the fullness of a noonday or of summer, but tremulous and delicate, like the calyx of lilies, so poetically evoked.

## WYCKAERT, MAURICE

Born in Brussels in 1923. Studied at the Academy of Fine Arts of his native city. A member of the Groupe International Situationniste.

One-man shows in Brussels, Venice, Essen, Munich and Milan. — Represented in the museums of Bochum and of Silkeborg.

BIBLIOGRAPHY : E. Lambilliotte, « Maurice Wyckaert », Brussels 1955.

MAURICE WYCKAERT demonstrated his talents in the very first exhibition he gave in Brussels, in 1947. The young painter, who had but just left the Academy of Fine Arts, showed boldly brushed still lifes. Rouault-red contrasted with deep blues. The horizontal lines predominated, in a solidly balanced construction. The style announced a generous and energetic nature.

This fiery personality was not readily recognizable in the canvases of abstract tendency that Wyckaert exhibited a few years later. Their monochrome character, their unsure graphic composition were disconcerting. That so spontaneous and lyrical a painter could have chosen the grave and pondered artist Gaston Bertrand as his master proved that his conversion to the non-figurative rested on foundations that were not too reassuring. At this exhibition, however, the young Wyckaert did reveal a certain number of canvases that were impeccable in technique. Such, among others, was the case of a few works executed in a range of very delicate blues.

It is now evident that Wyckaert — typically Flemish in his sharp sense of color, in his innate love of the land and his exuberance — did not really find himself until after his meeting with the Groupe International Situationniste, particularly with Asger Jorn, and after his rediscovery of nature. This last process was determined by the study of the canvases that Claude Monet painted toward the end of his life, that is, after 1921. Wyckaert learned from these, in particular, that pure color has the power of elevating the representation of nature to an extreme lyricism, which can take the same liberties



as abstract art, while deriving its unity and its strength from the essential characteristics of the landscape that one wants to represent or suggest. Through colors even less mixed, and through a neo-expressionist whirl of lines and volumes, the Dane Asger Jorn went beyond the lyricism of the French master. This double encounter gave the green light to that which was impulsive in Wyckaert's talent.

As he progressed on the path of the *abstract landscape* (we have already used this term in connection with Louis Van Lint's art) his works became more convincing, more moving. It was, if one will, the return of the friendly seascapes and landscapes without in any way limiting the infinite possibilities of abstract art. Views of the world, which are suggestion rather than image. The first canvases in this vein seemed to be enlargements of certain details chosen from the work of Monet. Wyckaert, however, soon found his own direction, and he showed us large baroque canvases, in which the horizon, the trees, the fields and the farms were reduced to violent contrasts of color. Sometimes in an identical gamut: blue contrasting with white, green with red. It must be added that the vibrant vitality of these works emanates not only from the colors. It springs from the dynamic and syncopated composition as well, based on a powerful and impulsive pattern of lines.

The art whose birth we thus witness is one which we might call a new expressionism, in which the treatment and the palette are entirely unhampered. It is the expression of a deep unity between the artist and nature.

## GILLES, RAYMOND

Born in Louvain in 1923. Painter, creator of cartoons and book dummies, artistic adviser on colors, professor at the People's University of Malines.

Exhibitions in Brussels, Liège, Antwerp and Malines. — Articles on contemporary plastic arts in the reviews « Bouwen en Wonen », « Summer » and « Kontakt ».

Driven by a character inhospitable to half-measures and compromises, RAYMOND GILLES went from one extreme to the other in the period following the war. In 1947, he exhibited in Antwerp and Brussels a series of neo-expressionistic sketches and canvases in which the uni-

verse of the concentration camps was evoked in a hallucinatory manner. The coloration was that of the most desperate wretchedness, and the emaciated and tormented faces of the victims of Buchenwald tended toward caricature.

But about 1952 Gilles launched upon a path diametrically opposite to the one he had followed until then, and expressionist influences from this point on were to be felt only in his grimacing cartoons. The painter now followed faithfully in the footsteps of Wassily Kandinsky in his coldly thought-out canvases. Gilles, too, set out to calculate the effect of colors, enclosed in innumerable juxtaposed compartments and covering the canvas with a very decorative movement. By patient calculations he determined their luminousness and their dimensions. The resulting work was notable for its somewhat distant aristocratic overtones.

It is to be regretted that passion, which is surely present in every painter, should appear so little in the canvases that Gilles paints today — a passion which his wife, Stella Vanderauwera, makes so distinctly felt in canvases which in other respects have a close affinity with those of her husband. We may hope that both artists will some day succeed in reconciling perfectly the expression of their emotions and their desire to achieve a clearly thought-out work.

## LONDOT, LOUIS-MARIE

Born in Namur in 1924. Studied at the Academy of this city during the war.

From 1945 has participated in group events in Belgium. — One-man shows in Brussels in 1957, 1959 and 1962. — Co-founder of the Axe 59 group created in reaction against the local stylistic conformity. — Has executed mural paintings and especially stained-glass windows for churches of the Namur region and the Belgian province of Luxemburg, built or converted by the architect R. Bastin.

BIBLIOGRAPHY : A. Lamotte, « Art d'Eglise », Saint-André-lez-Bruges, Nos. 112 (1960) and 116 (1961).

It was in 1956, after having completed his period of apprenticeship and incubation, that LOUIS-MARIE LONDOT had recourse to the resources and the powers of *matérialisme*. For some years now, great red-hued canvases with scoriaceous asperities, roughly defined in free structures, have communicated to us a kind of strange and brutal geological lyricism. We perceive

nature in them no longer in its image but on the basis of the physical sensation of the mineral textures, reinvented on the canvas itself. *Londot* thus evokes, in a context of surface excrescences, of granulations, imprints, scratchings and incandescent streaks of light, the presence of the soil, the rock, the chalk-stones and derives from these effects a tactile expression of fine authenticity.

## WARRAND, MARCEL

Born in Namur in 1924. A student at the Academy of Fine Arts of this city (1940-1944).

Has participated, since 1945, in local exhibitions. — Co-founder of the *Axe 59* group.

After turning, during his period of self-searching and exploration, to a fixed stylization derived from a certain manner of André Lhote's style, MARCEL WARRAND abandoned figuration about 1955 and explored various techniques — painting on aluminum in particular — in order to dissimulate his hesitations and his timidities. By 1961 he was practicing a limpid painting that flowed from a meditative approach, dominated by whites, grays, light ochres. Subdued modulations, fleeting iridescences, fluid transparencies whose underlying shadings recall the Frenchman Compard's spectral allusions and his poetics of the imprecise, shimmer through the smooth texture of Warrand's paintings.

## SAVERYS, JEAN

Born in Petegem-lez-Deinze July 31, 1924. Studied at the Ghent Academy of Fine Arts and at the Free Academy of Paris.

Co-founder of the *Art Abstrait* group. — He participated in group exhibitions in Paris, Edinburgh, Milan, São Paulo, Leopoldville and Caen. — One-man shows in Brussels, Antwerp and Amsterdam.

Son of Albert Saverys, the impulsive painter of the Lys, JEAN SAVERYS was one of the first abstract painters in Belgium after the Second World War. Since 1945 he had

been painting in the style of Hans Hartung and liked to contrast violent oranges and gleaming blacks. The sentiment he then expressed was already ardently lyrical. Wholly absorbed by his duties as director for the Benelux countries of one of the largest American furniture manufacturers and perhaps also secretly questioning his colored effects, too easily achieved, Saverys, in 1955, completely retired from the art world. Without, however, abandoning painting, he allowed himself a period of reflection.

It was in early 1962 that he exhibited again, this time beyond his own country's frontiers, in Amsterdam in particular. He showed, however, only a part of the work that he had meanwhile accumulated. It was noted that the generous feeling was still there, scarcely changed, but that its expression had become much more personal and more convincing. In his canvases, as in his watercolors, Jean Saverys offers us an art which is above all spontaneous, in which the colors glide like water along the canvas or the paper, always harmonious, sometimes parallel, sometimes scrambled, in violent contrasts ranging from the most screaming yellows to the most dazzling reds and the brightest blues.

One might be tempted to look for a certain structure beneath this avalanche of colors, but what we have is rather the color itself which flows freely and abundantly. So much so that the entire surface is always kept in movement, which further increases the general impression of freshness and sensitivity. The transparency of the coloration, too, contributes to this impression, seeming as it does to be continually bathed in sunlight, as though the paint itself had been applied to a luminous source. These are characteristics which will be found especially in his canvas *Waterverfschilderij*, reproduced here. Jean Saverys's art remains always simple, warm and generous. As though he considered only the sun to be worthy of his canvases.

## VANDERCAM, SERGE

Born in Copenhagen in 1924. First a photographer of international renown, he later came to devote himself solely to painting and ceramics.

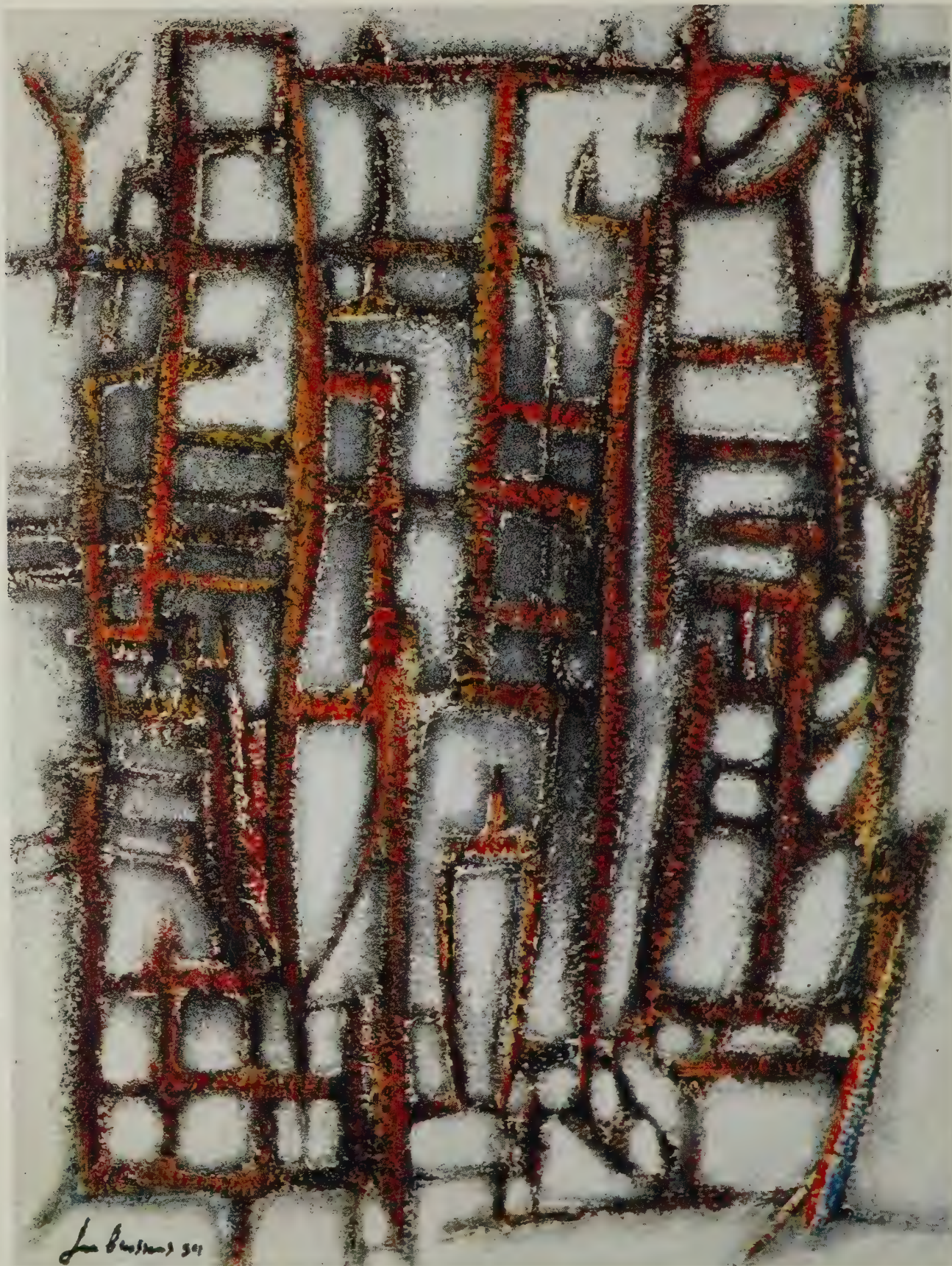
Co-founder of the *Taptoe Circle and Gallery*. — Participated in 1962 in the Marzotto exhibitions. — Many exhibitions in Europe and in the United States. — Represented in the museums of Liège, Rotterdam, Berlin, Silkeborg, Lissone and Schiedam. — Made films of the Iceland





143.  
Jean SAVERYS  
Waternverfschilderij, 1959, 97 x 81, gouache.  
R. Vanes collection, Brussels.





144.  
Jan BURSENS  
Composition, 1954  
70 x 50, oil on linen.  
Private collection.



fishermen (« 0.933 »), of the churches of Cappadoce and of Granville's drawings and engravings (« Un autre monde »).

BIBLIOGRAPHY : Philippe d'Arschot, « Serge Vandercam » in « Art International », Vol. III, 1959, Zurich.

Who has failed to perceive that since 1955 nature again occupies an important place in painting ? The geometric abstraction of painters like Vasarely or Mortensen is of course an exception to the rule : The art of these artists seeks only the icy peaks of the spirit. Abstract or lyrical expressionism, on the other hand, seeks to exclude only landscapes as such. It is not the sensual aspect of things that attracts the painters of this school, which finds its essence in the evocation of the vital forces of nature. Creative and elementary energies are expressed with exuberant profusion and savagery. In today's painting trees toss, roots grow and burrow, rocks and minerals harden eternally in a congealed beauty.

This conception of nature we also find in the work of SERGE VANDERCAM. For him, nature is synonymous with vitality and dynamism. This idea manifests itself in his works in complex forms. Vitality, for example, is expressed through violent and dramatic contrasts. Karel Appel, although extremely refined, reveals himself in all his canvases to be an intuitive and uncompromising artist. Corneille is all reflection and meditation. With Serge Vandercam we find on the one hand the tenderness of a poet and on the other the frenzy of a primitive. The range of his palette is warm as a glimpse of spring and the violence of his brush strokes explodes like the crack of a whip.

Vandercam sees vital energy as a duel which opposes life to death and procreation to decrepitude. Death is suggested by the sere browns, but especially by black, on canvases made strangely oppressive by the total absence of light. There are times when the colors of death invade the entire painting, others, when they stretch their network of barbed wire across a barely suggested landscape. Or else we see them spread, like a lava, over the whole canvas. Among these colors which symbolize destruction, iridescent surfaces, baroque and delicate as ceramics, glitter with their thousand gleams. They have the variety, the startling richness and the decorative beauty of tiger skin, they are joyous and exuberant. The radiant quality of these canvases is produced by the dramatic contrast between a dark and savage arabesque and great dazzling surfaces.

But in thus describing them, one oversimplifies Vandercam's work. It is a relatively recent work, but a remarkably varied one, of which we can mention here only certain stages.

At the time when Vandercam was more given to amorphous masses, a transparent blue or a very pale pink were conspicuous in his palette. The *Composition rouge*, inspired by the mining disaster of Marcinelle, which won him the Jeune Peinture Belge prize in 1956, was first of all an outpouring of colors, an explosion of pent-up rage. Subsequently Vandercam practiced both a gestural art, characterized by a pattern of violet or black lines on light backgrounds, and a non-formal painting, compact and taut. He even returned for a moment to figurative painting, with the *Man with the Turban*, where he used very subtle green tints. In late 1961 he exhibited in Rotterdam a series of *abstract landscapes*. These works, closed and anxious, their surfaces covered with a dense vegetation, were to be quickly abandoned when masses of simple, lyrical colors asserted themselves and reappeared in the foreground.

In the terra cotta figures, exhibited in Verviers in 1959 under the title *Boues*, and in the ceramics with whimsical forms, executed in 1961 in Albisola, the artist again tried to express the creative and contradictory forces which to him are the fundamental principle of life and of nature. Without any doubt the work of Serge Vandercam represents in modern art the return of Dionysos. But as in *le gai savoir*, divinity sings and trembles at the same moment.

## KEUNEN, ALEXIS

Born in Brussels in 1925. Jeune peinture belge prize in 1952.

Exhibitions in Brussels and in Liège.

## BURSSSENS, JAN

Born in Malines in 1925 to a family of Flemish intellectuals, teachers and writers interested in the new ideas. From 1943 to 1945 studied at the Academy of Ghent, where he in turn has taught since 1959.

Has exhibited since 1950. — In 1955 sojourned in Paris, and in 1957 in Poland. — Won a UNESCO scholarship, spent

a few months in New York (late 1958-early 1959). — Besides frequent exhibitions in Belgium, chiefly in Ghent and in Brussels, showed his work in New York in 1959 and in 1960. — Has taken part in important international art events, Biennials of São Paulo (1953 and 1961) and Venice (1958), of Tokyo and of the «Jeunes» group in Paris (1959), among others. — Was listed among the Belgian candidates, in 1958, for the International Guggenheim prize (was selected that same year and again in 1961 to participate in the Carnegie Prize (Pittsburgh)), was included in 1959 in Cassel in the «Documenta II» exhibition, and in the selection for the Marzotto prize.

BIBLIOGRAPHY : Francine-C. Legrand, «Quadrum», Brussels, 1957, pp. 142-3. — K.-J. Geirlandt, «Het 5de Wiel», Ghent, April-May 1961.

JAN BURSSSENS's most significant paintings are the expression of a native exuberance and at the same time they convey a passionate reaching out, an eagerness to embrace the world. To this a certain inclination to the fantastic, somehow rooted in the realm of cosmic energies, adds a mysterious dynamism. For him the painted picture appears above all as the outlet and the point of metamorphosis of the maneuvers of the imaginary and the subconscious, in alternations of joyous outpouring and austere agitation.

His initial repertory like that of many others includes portraits, landscapes and still lifes of expressionist derivation. Seduced by the revelation of the abstract, he very soon turned to a painting emancipated from immediate relations with the real. It was at this stage that he gave his first showing on the walls of a Brussels Gallery (the Apport 1950 Salon) alongside of Alechinsky and Hugo Claus. Committed to this path, Burssens began by drawing, in response to the simple demands of intuitive impulse, massive flourishes in an opaque, brilliant black on backgrounds of sandy colors. These ideograms, which betray a tortured ardor, soon developed a more complex consistency in webs of branches spreading over a thick and gritty texture (1954), and then took in sections of trees, in which the pictorial substance and the plant element are welded and become one.

Burssens's works at this point find their justification in the light of that inner urge that impels him to associate physical sensations and psychic perceptions with rhythms of growth to which he gives an anthropomorphic interpretation. Are we to regard this as indicating a temptation to return to the figurative? It is to be observed, in any case, that there are many suggestions of human outlines in the criss-cross of lines, which reveal a perceptive appropriation of elements borrowed from reality and from life, but transposed without regard to the styles of the imaged representation.

Recognizing the danger of yielding to the seduction of color, but more especially concerned with giving a tonal coherence to the swarming ramifications of the strokes and hatchings that conveyed the intentions of his sensibility, Burssens limited himself to a sober palette in which glazed white, gray and gray-blue predominate, without, however, ceasing to explore new possibilities in the realm of paint quality. Nevertheless, the colorist was soon to manifest himself and to reveal a generous capacity for development.

This was probably the decisive turning-point in his growth as an artist. It coincided with the contacts the artist made in 1958 with the new American painting and its bold innovations, practically unknown at the time in Belgium. There can be no doubt that this experience gave a new impetus to his art. It liberated him, in particular, from a somewhat narrow grasp of pictorial language and stimulated his lyrical bent.

The ease, and especially the assurance, that he lacked suddenly became manifest upon his return from this trip. He executed a series of large canvases, tormented in treatment, which betray a visionary obsession as much as they concern the passions of mind and body. We can see in them figures of energy and hymn-like effusions made suggestive by the expansive fashioning of chromatic movements.

Deliberately indefinite in the impetuous soaring of their vitality, his paintings — in which figured presences constantly float like phantoms — unfailingly elude the reassuring principles of plastic determination. The successive transformations that they undergo in the inner action are displayed in a flood of rolling and vanishing movements. The contour lines, which previously held in the forces of effusion as in a net, now dissolve in a texture of flame-like touches, dictated by the enthusiasms and obsessions, by the artist's states of anguish and joy.

In his recent paintings we frequently see displayed a strage eruptive unleashing, which at the same time is secretly ordered in its uneasy and stirring tensions. The sensation of the ephemeral, of the transitory, of the completed, of passing time reverberates in an unreal space traversed by allegorical spectres. Dense, rich colors, at times tempered by the display of caressing golds, communicate a generous baroque ardor. It is obvious that a marked susceptibility to the arguments proffered by recollections of a certain representation can be discerned in these canvases. But what is equally obvious is the irrational keenness provoked by the burst of lyrical abstraction knowingly appropriated for the





145.  
Jan BURSENS  
Carmen, 1957, 100 x 80, oil on linen.  
Private collection.



transfiguration of thematic references. So that we might say that what we find in Jan Burssens's art is the awakening of a new figurative language in the warm and feverish mobility of this ample convergence.

## LUCAS, RICHARD

Born in Brussels in 1925. A student at the Academy of Fine Arts of this city. Has participated, since 1950, in the activity of the La Sirène Gallery, and since 1959 in that of the Smith Gallery in Brussels.

Showed his first canvases in 1951. — One-man shows in Brussels, Ghent, Grenchen and Venice. — Has also taken part in a number of « avant-garde » group shows in several European centers.

RICHARD LUCAS appears to have found an outlet for his aspirations from the moment when he abandoned elements of representation in favor of a painting of pure impulse, which has become the dynamic component of his great canvases of 1959 and the succeeding years. There is in fact a fundamental break between the initial phase of his career and this exuberant manner, close to that of the Frenchman Benrath. One of his commentators, alluding to the theme of Cythera which the artist has used in the title of many of his paintings, suggests that one can discern in the wavy depths and the submerged gleams of the ultramarines and the vermillions "allegories of love and torment, of voluptuous grief and tragic excitation."

## VAN HOEYDONCK, PAUL

Born in Antwerp October 8, 1925. Studied at the Institut Supérieur d'Histoire de l'Art et d'Archéologie. Co-founder of the G 58 group in his native city.

Exhibitions in Europe and America. — Participated in the Monochrome Malerei general exhibition in Leverkusen in 1960 and in other group shows. — Represented in numerous collections.

BIBLIOGRAPHY : Francine-C. Legrand, « Paul van Hoeydonck », in « Quadrum 8 », Brussels 1960.

In order to discover the originality and the diversity of his talent, PAUL VAN HOEYDONCK had to make a sharp break with the kind of painting that he had practiced at the start. His point of departure had in fact been geometric abstraction, which he preferred to tachisme because untidiness and extravagance were contrary to his nature, but which he soon abandoned, for nothing is more foreign to his fiery temperament than the insensitivity of a Mondrian or a Vantongerloo, which he had at first tried to achieve for himself. However, not being one of those versatile artists who turn away today from one school to join the very opposite school tomorrow, Van Hoeydonck did not reject geometric abstraction but tried to go beyond it. He succeeded, we believe, thanks to a double effort. On the one hand, he pushed abstract principles to their ultimate consequence : an absolutely white or black plane. On the other hand, he attempted to enrich painting by new ingredients, like plexiglas, painted or pyro-engraved wood, nails, screws and plastics, all placed in relief or flat on the panel. It would be foolish to claim that all these experiments were discoveries or innovations. Yves Klein is another who turned to monochrome only after Malevitch; after Schwitters, Burri and Fontana, hundreds of painters, in many countries, have experimented in the use of new materials.

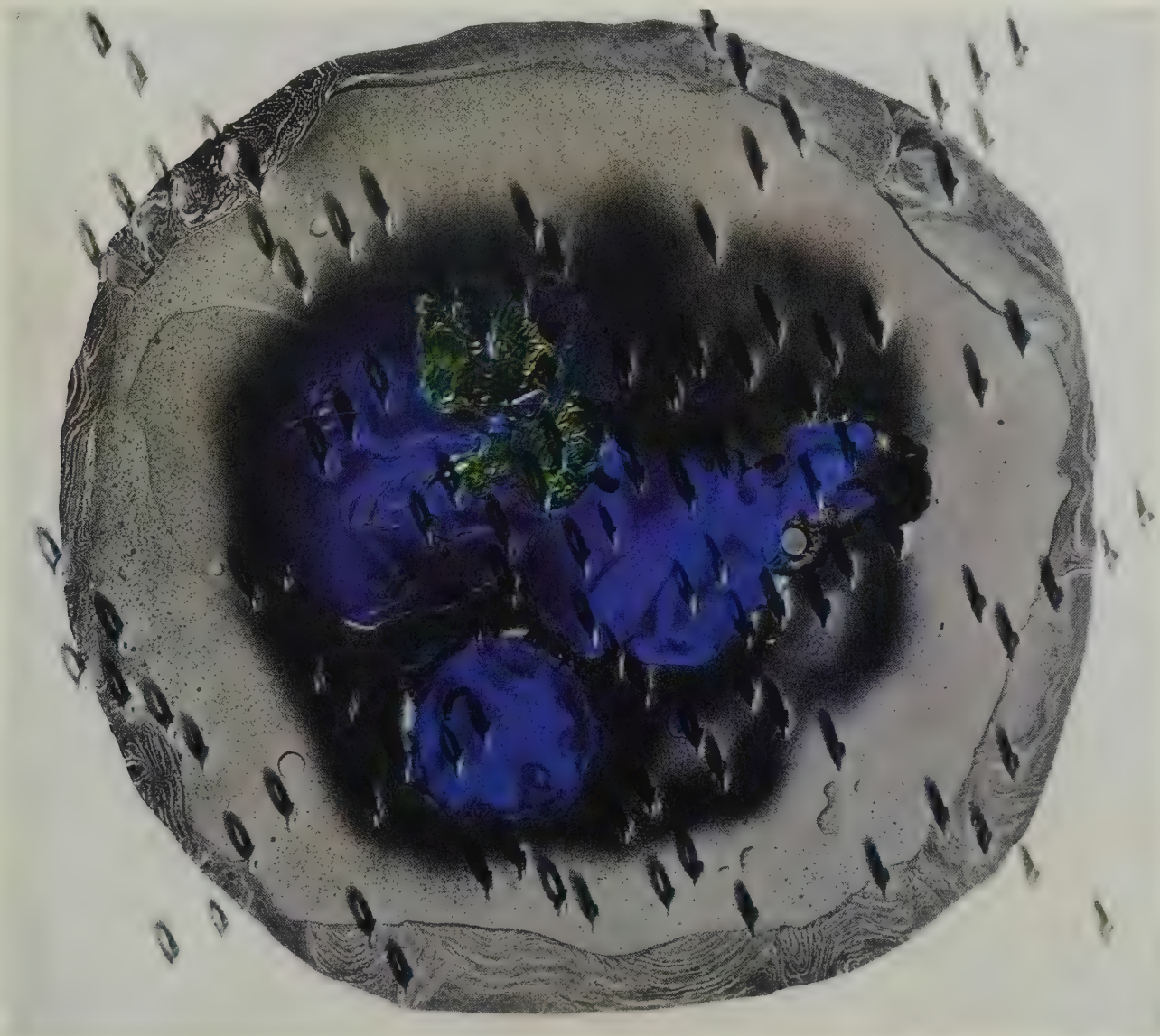
What interests us in the present case, therefore, is to know what Paul Van Hoeydonck has achieved at the crossroads of these two tendencies of modern art. We find first of all that the unity of inspiration, resulting from the convergence of different tendencies, has given rise not to one, but to several series of works, the language of which is so convincing that by itself alone it would suffice to rank Paul Van Hoeydonck among the outstanding painters. He created a sensation when he showed a series of large white panels, generally square in form, of which the composition constituted by lines and lightly colored planes could not be perceived at first glance. Their delicate combination of yellow, blue and rose glints recalls the iridescence of a dewdrop. These are purely musical works which evoke the immense dazzling and transparent spaces that Gagarine and Glenn must have seen.

Sometimes, too, instead of applying colors to his white panels, Van Hoeydonck sticks pieces of white or colored plexiglas to them, giving us the impression of drops of water frozen to a mirror. When a light is turned on these subtle structures, the work is metamorphosed into a polar landscape that delights and astonishes. Later, finding his materials among the beams, the scrap-iron and junk that the port of Antwerp spread at his feet,



the artist composed curious figurines and made amusing chests more or less in the dadaist manner, in which nails and glass convexities facetiously substituted for the gold and diamonds of kings and princes. But presently he again became fascinated by the siderial revolutions that the planets accomplish in space. On evenly dark blue, dark brown or black surfaces, he drove nails and screws that sparkled like specks of light in the infinity of the firmament. We show here one of the finest examples

of the *Planets* series. It is built on the sole opposition of two colors. We see that Paul Van Hoeydonck remains faithful to the two fundamental principles of his art : to go beyond geometric abstraction by humanizing it and bringing it close to nature, and to make the most diverse materials undergo metamorphoses which endow them with emotion and poetry. The sensation of space evoked by Van Hoeydonck's work is prodigious : one's eyes would get lost in the dizzy depths created here, were



146.  
Paul VAN HOEYDONCK  
Planet, 1962, 43 x 48, oil on wood.  
Private collection.

it not for the scintillation of the stars and the planets attached to the dark firmament like so many sparks of gold or of dew. How could the soul remain unmoved before this depth endowed with so strange a life? An art consciously built on a craft basis can thus be productive of effects extending far beyond those of mere craftsmanship. It has, indeed, always seemed to us that Paul Van Hoeydonck's panels were the work, first and foremost, of a poet dominated by an immense desire for purity and freedom, a kind of absolute which man has encountered these last years, in the spaces that surround our planet.

## LACOUR, SIMONE

Born in Antwerp in 1926. Studied at the Academy of Fine Arts of Liège, then at the Ecole nationale supérieure d'architecture et des arts décoratifs (E.N.S.A.A.D.) in Brussels (1951). Settled in Paris in 1954 and worked in F. Léger's studio. Evolved from expressionism to abstraction after having rubbed elbows with surrealism.

Single-artist shows in Liège, Brussels and Paris since 1955. — Has collaborated with Léon Zack in the execution of church mosaics in France.

SIMONE LACOUR's works — to which umbers and luminous blacks bring a dramatic character, and surely enrich them often — are inspired by the appeal of mineral and plant textures, which she uses to maintain the imaginative suggestions of the abstract in contact with the material substance of things.

## MACKOVIAC, ERWIN

Born in Gladbeck, Germany, in 1926. Has lived in Houdeng-Goegnies, in the province of Hainaut, since 1947. Member of the Amis de l'Art circle and of the Cercle Artistique Hennuyer group.

BIBLIOGRAPHY : Maurits Bilcke, Catalogue of Les Contemporains exhibit, Brussels, 1961 ; Exhibition catalogue, Märkisches Museum, Witten, Germany, 1961 ; Catalogue Schloss Wittringen Heimatmuseum exhibition, Stadt Gladbeck, Germany, 1961.

## DE LEEUW, BERT

Born in Antwerp June 8, 1926. Prize winner at the Première Biennale des Jeunes, Paris, 1959. Member of the G 58 circle and of the Nieuwe Vlaamse School group.

Exhibits : Prix Marzotto 1960 ; Paris Biennial 1959 ; Tokyo Biennial 1961 ; Prix de la Critique, Charleroi 1961.

BIBLIOGRAPHY : Jan Walravens and Jean Dypréau, Invitation to the exposition Ad Libitum, Antwerp, April 1961. — Maurits Bilcke, « Het Vijfde Wiel », June-July 1961. — Maurits Bilcke and Jean Dypréau, Exhibition catalogue, Marcelle Dupuis Gallery, Paris 1962.

BERT DE LEEUW, whom we met for the first time on the occasion of the inaugural exhibition of the G 58 circle, at the Hessenhuis in Antwerp, had previously given us the opportunity of admiring one of his canvases, *Sombre dimanche*, given an award by the jury of the prix de la Jeune Peinture Belge, 1957. We met the artist, not at his home, but in his studio, which is situated in one of the oldest districts in the center of the city. With the adjoining rooms, the stairways, the halls and the rooms that surround it, it forms a setting ideally indicated for a surrealist motion picture director in search of a background for a scene of terror. During the above-mentioned exhibition, Bert De Leeuw told us that it was his ambition to paint canvases which would have the faculty of undergoing a metamorphosis once they left his studio. What he meant became perfectly clear to us before the canvases *Amère Passion*, *Mithra*, and *Le Cri du Gaulois*, at the Jeune Peinture Belge 1959 exhibition. Before these paintings, we should scarcely have been surprised to see the patches of color swell or melt, tear or burst. What the painter was attempting here was to wrench himself free from the purely materialist and static character of a rebellious matter. In these canvases, form gradually stretches, dissolves in cloud, is swallowed up in fog, and vanishes in smoke. The boiling depths of the earth and the objects soaring high in the sky blend with long pearl-gray veils or light brown vapors.

Light shines with an ever greater brightness which has the virtue of metamorphosing the canvas. In fact, by using a new element, fluorescence, the artist produces works that change with the light and according to the position of the viewer. What was shiny becomes dull, and what was dark becomes bright, the negative gradually mutates into positive, as on the magic fan of an aurora borealis. After the shadowy reverses of the grained parts of the canvas, one discovers their illuminated face sides. Mysterious graphic signs slowly emerge, while others vanish. Certain parts of the canvas





147.

Bert DE LEEUW  
Cut down (in French « Sabrée »), 1960  
135 x 115, oil on linen.  
Private collection.

which had remained veiled suddenly shine like powdery, silvered snow in the rising sun. The velvety softness of wet slopes alternates with the dryness of smooth and arid plains. As he moves before the painting, the viewer participates directly in the active life of the can-

148.

Bert DE LEEUW  
Composition, 68 x 48, body-colour.  
The artist collection.



vas and is carried along in the creative process. The effect is irresistible. There is no longer a single point of view or perspective. As various beams of light are directed from several sources, the coloring of the canvas changes. Moreover, the mobility of the light sources results in a mobility of the forms. And thus the different spaces of the painting influence one another, to the point of modifying their aspect. Our surprise is such that we want to see the modifications in the aspect of the canvas repeated.

But there is more involved in this than a simple technical invention, an ingenious trick. The artist seems to feel the necessity to transform the matter that he uses into space. For De Leeuw, painting is not only a gesture, a victory over the matter and the surface of the canvas, a simple manifestation of the intellect, it is above all an attempt to achieve transcendancy. What he feels the call to master at all costs is the moral force necessary to go beyond the experience of the senses and spiritualize space, by elevating the canvas above its material limits, the laws of gravity and the materialism of color. As though by some magic operation, chemistry would become an art of painting.

The subtle effects of fluorescence cast their spell over us and carry us away into a cosmic space. Our intelligence will warn us that this is simply suggestion. But our eye, if it is ever so slightly practiced in responding to artistic and poetic solicitations, will see in it a reality. And here we touch the essence of Bert De Leeuw's art: Simplicity, not in the sense of absence of complication, but of absence of suspiciousness and mental reservation. Truth honestly experienced is the necessary condition for any artistic creation.

We might dwell on the mystical attraction of these canvases: they restore to us the gift of contemplation and cause us to communicate mysteriously with them.

Having won a prize at the Paris Biennial, Bert De Leeuw could have exploited this success. He preferred to continue on his way, with a slow, sure step, without doing violence to his talent. Not that he is afraid of risk. The black-and-white contrasts of his most recent canvases, whose surprising simplicity requires great self-mastery and an infallible touch, would prove the contrary.

Being an artist of integrity, Bert De Leeuw constantly questions himself as to the meaning of his language, his sense of existence, the aim of his art. His instinct and his conscience, through biological necessity, create a harmony. Dramatic at times, it is always pure and authentic. From year to year it has never failed to move and to excite us.





149.  
Guy VANDENBRANDEN  
Composition, 1960  
120 x 100, oil on linen.  
Private collection.

## VANDENBRANDEN, GUY

Born in Brussels July 14, 1926. Member of the Art Abstrait, Formes, Art Construit and Nieuwe Vlaamse School groups.

BIBLIOGRAPHY : Maurits Bilcke, « De Gazet van Antwerpen », December 27, 1950, on the occasion of Vandenbranden's first one-man show ; March 24, 1954, February 16, 1955, November 14, 1956, March 4, 1959, February 8, 1961. — Jean Séaux and Ivo Michiels, Catalogue for the Galerie Saint-Laurent exhibition, February 28, 1959. — Marco Valsecchi, Galleria Pater catalogue, Milan, October 5, 1960. — Ivo Michiels, Adriaan de Roover and L.-L. Sosset, « Nul », No. 3.

GUY VANDENBRANDEN very early in his career turned to rigorously constructed abstract composition, and has remained faithful to it. The romantic and the tragic are totally foreign to him. A clear mind and an uncompromising logic have led him along the path of firmness and perseverance, thus as a matter of fact, along the path of the success.

His talent is essentially devoted to the development of the work of certain pioneers of abstract constructivism and to the exploration of realms still unknown. Taking as his point of departure the neo-plasticism of Mondrian, van Doesburg and Vantongerloo, he applies himself particularly to the plastic embodiment or expression of the concepts of order and purity, harmony and clarity, simplicity and sincerity.

The modifications that we observe in Vandenbranden's work are not the result of an inevitable evolution. They are the continuation of experiments which are all carried out on the same plane. So we find, for example, that at a given time the elementary colors give way to more shaded tonalities in the coats of color always spread in the same even way. The broad black lines, which have the same value as the colored planes, progressively broaden, and later the coloration itself is gradually limited to black and white. We find the artist next abandoning the horizontal-vertical arrangement and increasingly extending the line to the dimensions of a plane. Finally only a single plane remains which covers nearly the whole surface of the canvas, leaving on one side of it only a narrow white oblique interspace or stripe.

The sovereignty of the black plane thus becomes absolute, ruling out any dimension in depth and any notion of space. The notion of "space", in fact, is blotted out by that of "surface", and Vandenbranden thus pays tribute to planimetry while he wholly ignores the least notion of stereometry.

One more step, and the black plane would win absolute power and occupy the entire canvas which has now

become monochrome. Vandenbranden does not go quite that far. He does not fall into Klein's rut : in order to maintain his surface relations — and perhaps it would be better to speak of area relations — the presence of another color, even white, proves indispensable.

Henceforth the artist no longer appeals solely to the straight line and to the plane cut at right angles. Broken and wavy lines, oblique and rounded planes appear. Circles and distended arcs inspire the painter. The composition is thus animated by a new geometric dynamism which, without suggesting movement, nevertheless gives rhythm to its static aspect.

Even if we admit, with Vantongerloo, that art and science obey the same laws, we cannot remain indifferent to the poetry that emanates from Vandenbranden's canvases. This poetry, exceptionally sensitive and at the same time minutely calculated, is what makes modern building complexes habitable. It is the poetry of a spiritual climate, which is a vital necessity for modern man, if he is to believe in the future. Through it, Vandenbranden's art is surely an example of purity.

## SEMPELS, GEO

Born in Lubbeek October 22, 1926. Middle Normal School (painting) in Brussels, Alost Academy (portrait painting) and courses in architecture. Co-founder of the review « Lens » ; contributed to the review « Tijd en Mens ».

1960 : First one-man show at the Le Zodiaque Gallery in Brussels ; preface to the catalogue by Maurits Bilcke.

BIBLIOGRAPHY : Maurits Bilcke, « De Gazet van Antwerpen », March 23, 1960. — Jos Murez, « Vooruit », March 1960.

GEO SEMPELS achieves purity of abstract form through a progressive simplification and synthesis. By arbitrarily limiting the theme of his work, he gives it a logical unity. Enormous smears of color hold out their arms on the canvas, like broad ribbons or strange beams. At times broken, they attempt to increase the surface of the canvas and seem to extend beyond its limits to invade space. The coloration of the light, which flows from a mysterious twilight, invites us to venture beyond the threshold of the structured space. A space which envelops us with its calm, while carrying us into the cosmic climate of supernatural depths and heights.



Sempels's canvases are charged with both a dramatic tension and a robust and calming power.

## VANDENDRIESSCHE, LUCIEN

Born in Deinze December 6, 1926. Modern Classical studies. Self-taught as a painter.

Exhibitions in Brussels in 1957 and 1962. — Represented at the Museum of Verviers and in private collections.

The art of LUCIEN VANDENDRIESSCHE is on the borderline between the abstract and the figurative. The artist shows square and rectangular blocks, placed in relief on the panel, and dominated by an immense twilight sky. The roofs of small scattered hamlets in the landscape and approaching night are readily recognizable. Or it may be an irregular piling-up of volumes, almost always purple-tinged, at times covered with gold and silver, whose delicate shades charm us by their poetic effect. This cubic construction has later become more aerated and the painter has tried to introduce the use of iron in his compositions. The resulting lessening of poetic intensity is compensated by a sensation of anguish. Poetry and anguish are in fact the two sentiments that dominate by turns in Vandendriessche's work — a work which up to the present is only a promise, but which already shows sure craftsmanship and a sharp sensibility.

## CORRIAT, ROGER-J.

Born in Brussels in 1927. Self-taught as a painter. Works in solitude. Abandoned figuration in 1957.

First one-man show in 1959. Likewise practices ceramics.

The violent black splashes on a shimmer of shaded scumble which characterised the early canvases of ROGER-J. CORRIAT have given way to a marked predilection for simplification and concentration, compensated by the amplification of the graphic signs and by the sensorial contribution of the paint quality.

## VANDERAUWERA, STELLA

Born in 1927 in Malines, where she teaches at the Academy of Fine Arts.

Exhibitions in Brussels, Antwerp and Malines.

## VAN SEVEREN, DAN

Born in Lokeren February 8, 1927. Studied with G. Hermans in Ghent and with Antoon Marstboom in Antwerp.

One-man shows : Galerie Accent, Antwerp, January 1957 ; Hessenhuis, Antwerp, February 1960. — Group exhibits : 1957 : Jeune Peinture Belge, Brussels, Jeune Peinture Belge, Verviers, Premio Lissone, Milan. — 1958 : Peintres belges d'aujourd'hui, Diest ; L'Art du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle, Charleroi ; De Jonge Vlaamse Schilderkunst, Antwerp ; Hedendaagse Vlaamse Schilderkunst, Bruges, Ypres, Tournai ; G 58, Hessenhuis, Antwerp. — 1959 : Tenth anniversary of the Jeune Peinture Belge, Charleroi ; first Youth Biennial in Paris. — 1960 : Galleria Danese, Milan ; Nuove tendenze de artisti Belgi, Galleria Pagani del Grattacielo, Milan ; G 58, Hessenhuis, Antwerp ; Salon Quadriennial, Ghent.

BIBLIOGRAPHY : Ivo Michiels, « Het Handelsblad », January 22, 1956. — Marc Callewaert, « De Gazet van Antwerpen », February 20, 1957 and early March 1960.

DAN VAN SEVEREN is too personal for us to class him off-hand into a given -ism. He belongs to the category of lone wolves who appear indifferent, who produce little, but who are none the less persistent workers who never let go of a canvas until, after many modifications, it finally pleases them. The initial theme develops slowly, not only in its physical elaboration, but also in his head. It is in this slow maturing of each particular painting, and of his work as a whole, that the strength of Van Severen's art lies and that its specific character is affirmed.

Van Severen achieves the discovery of what is essential to him by studying the relations between spirit and matter, by examining their interaction and their reciprocal influence. Having a critical turn of mind, he tends to seek extreme solutions. For this reason he limits himself to only a few of the themes that come to him, he keeps his colors sober, he eliminates everything that is accidental and accessory. Thus it is not rare to see him come close to the simplicity that was Malevitch's glory.

The motif of the cross reappears like an obsession in the composition of his early works. It was later to give way to other motifs — the circle, the rectangle, the square, the lozenge, the truncated curve, and the angle. These



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Dan VAN SEVEREN  
Composition, 1961-1962  
129 x 97, oil on linen.  
Private collection.



geometric figures are generally to be found in the center of the canvas and are integrated into a more modest composition, which surrounds them.

The climate of Van Severen's work, however, cannot be compared to the scientific rigor nor to the cold calculations of a discipline in which all the elements are meticulously coordinated. The organic development of the motif evokes, rather, the sobriety, with its rich overtones of sensitivity, of the early Romanesque churches, the impressive symbols drawn on the walls of the Christian catacombs, and, however out of place the comparison may appear, the rain-washed and discolored road signs along the automobile highways. Van Severen's work, in fact, reveals an indefinable conjunction of a hypersensitive modernism and the melancholy of ages gone by.

Here we, really have before us the work of a specific representative of modern religious art: the representative, not of an ecclesiastical art, but of a sacred art. The signs that Van Severen paints invite to prayer and contemplation. They shun the tumult and it seems to us that nowhere would they be more at home than in a plain, silent church, or on the wall of some old farm.

The same obstinacy characterizes both Van Severen's personality and his work. Both wage a stubborn but level-headed battle against excessive darkness and blinding light. The extremely refined shades of the browns, the grays, the blacks, the whites and the blues unceasingly and unobtrusively oppose the changing effects of light, ever subject to the caprices of our climates. The mysticity of the countries of the North here reveals itself in a series of signs, vaguely symbolical, which are particularly persuasive: whoever has contemplated them can never forget them.

## SWIMBERGHE, GILBERT

Born in Saint-André-lez-Bruges, May 14, 1927. Studied at the Bruges and the Saint-Josse-ten-Noode Academies.

Exhibits: Raaklijn, Bruges, Mars 1959; Saint-Laurent, Brussels, 1960; Kunst-Centrum, Bruges, 1961; Les Contemporains, Brussels, 1962.

BIBLIOGRAPHY: Marcel Duchâteau, Catalogue, Exhibition, Raaklijn, Bruges, 1959. — Maurits Bilcke, Catalogue, Exhibition, Saint-Laurent, Brussels, 1960; Catalogue, Kunstcentrum Exhibit, Bruges, 1961. — Jaak Fontier, Catalogue, Kunstcentrum, Bruges, 1961; Catalogue, Kunstcentrum exhibition, Bruges, 1961; « De Periscoop », February 1960.

GILBERT SWIMBERGHE gave a showing of his work at the same time as Paul Van Hoeydonck, in March 1954, at the Théâtre de Poche in Brussels. We wrote at the time that the talent of this post-expressionist deserved to be attentively watched. His post-expressionism expressed itself in a somewhat heavy composition in which the subject, usually a still life, was severely stylized, to the point of being no more than a theme. It was this stylization and the integration of each individual plane in the horizontal plane of the canvas that led him toward a form of ideal beauty which was stripped of any accidental or fortuitous detail. Of the image and the coloration he kept nothing more than what was essential to create a composition having a solid sobriety, in which could be found all the characteristics of his fiercely personal style.

The tenacity and the intransigence of this style were such that the canvas proved to be inseparable from its creator: an artist perfectly master of expression, a man in command of his feelings and entrusting to his intelligence the control of his emotions. It might be supposed that such an attitude inevitably would produce a cold, heavy, and dry form. Far from it. Swimberghe's art is by no means a soulless geometry, purely decorative surface patterns. The coloration, limited to a small number of tonalities softly applied to the plane where they turn pale or darken, harmonizes with the surface as a whole. The role that color plays in Swimberghe's work cannot be underestimated: devoid of all affectation, it brings into being a poetry difficult to define which is perfectly wedded to the form, and emerges clearly from each canvas. The rhythm of the planes, too, is integral to the total effect: opening fanwise, their vanishing secants form a cadence, pure and serene, which seems to come into being spontaneously.

Swimberghe likewise creates reliefs and mosaics which are meant to be incorporated in today's architectural forms. The reliefs are composed of small stones and carefully selected pebbles. They are striking not only for their more or less geometric composition and their coloring of a natural softness, but also for the light effects. These effects result from the arrangement of the pebbles: on each plane they differ in form, color, and position. The humble character and the very limited possibilities of the material fully emphasize the artist's talent. The works that he executes by these means have a tactile eloquence, an aspect at once concrete and poetic. It would be surprising if modern architecture did not consider taking advantage of these experiments of Swimberghe's.

## ALECHINSKY, PIERRE

Born in Brussels October 19, 1927. Studied at the Ecole nationale supérieure d'architecture et des arts décoratifs de la Cambre in Brussels (book illustration). Next studied with Sam Hayter, the director of the Atelier 17, in Paris. Member of the Jeune Peinture Belge and co-founder of the Cobra group, 1949-1951.

Made a study trip in 1955 to Japan where he made the film « Calligraphie japonaise ». — Settled in Paris where he became a member of the Salon de Mai committee. Numerous writings on art and poetic texts (« Les Poupées de Dixmude »). — In 1962, in collaboration with Amos

Kernan, published « Les Tireurs de langue ». — Several exhibitions in Europe and in the United States. — Represented in many collections.

PIERRRE ALECHINSKY's canvases caused a sensation when they were first shown in 1945. As the painter was only eighteen, it was a temptation to label him an "adolescent prodigy". The epithet would certainly have irritated the proud and taciturn young man, who had just broken into the artistic circles of Brussels. At this time he already seemed quite sure of the path he ex-



151.

Gilbert SWIMBERGHE  
Composition 2, 1961  
113 x 142, oil on linen.  
Private collection.



pected to follow and not much inclined to let himself be distracted by idle words.

The canvases exhibited at that time admittedly showed the influence of Louis Van Lint and of his frenzied art. But they revealed at the same time an usual pictorial intelligence, in particular in the gradations of their coloration and the brightness of their composition. The influence soon disappeared, and the technical qualities remained. Alechinsky gradually drew away from the Brussels painters who were veering toward what could be called "a sensitized geometric abstraction". They had, to be sure, borrowed geometric planes and rationally planned composition from certain artists like Herbin and Vasarely. But what they intended to achieve, by means of freer contours and more subdued colors, was a painting halfway between the figurative and the abstract: a painting which would be sensitive without being violent, and studied without being cold. Pierre Alechinsky had no desire to confine himself within this compromise. He categorically rejected the cold abstraction of the years around 1949 and resolutely turned to the expressionism of such precursors as James Ensor and Munch, toward a popular, naïve and at times crude art, toward the drawings and graffiti of children and the insane. In doing so he was seeking a vitality and something instinctive which he felt to be lacking in the neo-abstract canvases of his contemporaries.

Every honestly and intensely experienced aesthetic conception at once attracts disciples. This is what happened in the case of Pierre Alechinsky's conceptions, which were soon shared by his fellow-citizen Christian Dotremont, a poet and subtle essayist, the author of perceptive introductions to Alechinsky's exhibitions, by the fiery Karel Appel and by the sober Corneille, who today are the two outstanding Dutch painters, and likewise by Asger Jorn, a whimsical and original Dane. It was with these artists that Alechinsky, in 1949, launched the Cobra movement. Although this movement lasted only two years, its brief existence gave rise to many exhibitions, not only in Belgium but abroad. It published a remarkable review, organized tumultuous meetings in Liège and in Amsterdam, and launched manifestos which opened new paths to painting.

The work stimulated by Cobra, viewed by external criteria, appears as a paradoxical synthesis between the figurative and the abstract. A synthesis which the Parisian public was slow to understand and which for a long time it characterized as a "bastard art". For a long time, in fact, Paris saw in the lyrical expressionism of the "young painters from the North" only an ambiguous

and impotent attitude, halfway between the art of Kandinsky and that of Nolde. It is true that the Cobra artists interpreted reality with the freedom of a Wols and in their abstract-looking compositions suggested telluric forces with the violence of a Beckman. It was only later that it would be recognized that they had in fact achieved a unity between an art whose mission it is to express the universe and an art whose substance resides in its formal qualities. The unity resulted both from a very clear consciousness of a language composed wholly of autonomous colors and lines and from a deep sense of participation in the organic existence of nature.

It would be difficult to define the essence of the art represented by the Cobra group better than by recalling what Michel Ragon wrote in connection with the Cobra - Ten years After exhibition which was held in Paris in May 1961: "The school of freedom (freedom of the touch, freedom of the spot, freedom of the sign, freedom of the paint quality flung by the handful or with a trowel on the canvas, freedom of the material which can just as readily be newsprint as Japanese rice paper, the wall of the house one is living in or a tree), caprice, humor, yes, humor, a preposterous humor, often acid or ferocious." A masterly definition, in which Michel Ragon reminds us, further on, that the Cobra artists themselves declared in their manifestoes that their aim was "to attain the surrealist dream as well as concrete facts in order to fuse them in a romantic realism." Which sheds light on their kinship with a Jean Dubuffet, one of the masters of the modern period, and emphasizes the importance that the work of the Cobra group has had for the tachistes and non-formalists.

What was Pierre Alechinsky's place in the movement considered as a whole? He was one of its very active moving spirits, but he differed from his comrades in two respects: on the one hand, by the importance assumed by the "writing" in his work and on the other, by his powerful feeling for nature. By "writing" we mean the manner of writing. Each one of Pierre Alechinsky's canvases seems to be "written" with the brush. (His style can in fact be recognized in the small fragment of a sentence that he scribbles on paper). For Alechinsky, painting, drawing and writing seem to be one and the same thing. When one analyzes his writing, the letters, the signs or the figures are found to be generally drawn in zigzags which are strangely reminiscent of the angular silhouette of Peter Bruegel's famous *Dulle Griet*. Like it, Alechinsky's writing is jerky and sinuous: a network of abrupt, dynamic, at times



152.  
 Pierre ALECHINSKY  
 Clouds in trousers, 1957  
 97 x 195, oil on linen.  
 Dotremont collection, Uccle-Brussels.

even disquieting lines, whose intervals suggest volumes. The anguishing impression that Alechinsky's canvases create is due in the first place to the contrast between the whirl of lines and the heaviness of the volumes that they circumscribe or cover over with capricious and cruel barbed wires.

The study voyage that Pierre Alechinsky made to Japan and the attention that he devoted to traditional and modern calligraphy have undoubtedly played an important role in the elaboration of the highly personal linear play which is an important characteristic of his style. The second characteristic, which we mentioned above, is the powerful feeling for nature. A feeling, as we said, which markedly separates Pierre Alechinsky from his fellows. Jorn, Appel and Corneille also create works which mark a certain relation with existing reality: the first two being in a sense painters of figures, and the third an expressionist who paints urban scenes. We need only recall Karel Appel's ardent nudes and his

portraits (among others, those of the great stars of jazz), or Asger Jorn's droll, almost disquieting figures. And we recall that Corneille seems obsessed by aerial views of cities, and shows the jumble of crowded districts and houses composing an organic whole.

In Pierre Alechinsky's work nature reigns. Even in his most recent works in which the human face appears more and more clearly. Nature does not appear to him, it is true, with the graces of an ingenuous landscape: on the contrary, it is a never-resting force, an inexhaustible wealth of forms, a gigantic eruption on the surface of nothingness. We may recall the famous considerations on nature by Jean-Paul Sartre in *La Nausée*. The sight of a monstrous tree inspired in Antoine Roquentin the feeling that all creation is superfluous. Alechinsky's work could be said to be a pictorial concretization of that feeling. What the artist's first canvases suggested was hardly an abstract concept. On the contrary, the violence of the lines and of the colors evoked



a powerful vitality. Nature is vital first of all : it is tree, cloud, root. Alechinsky cannot conceive it detached from those forms through which the vital urge manifests itself. He thus achieves that romantic realism which he has never ceased to advocate : a realism which brings out the triumphant and weariless energy of nature.

The viewer who is mindful of the anguish which emanates from Alechinsky's work, at each of its stages, will notice how dull and lacking in freshness his coloring originally was, progressing from dirty browns and grays to reds and browns of an almost painful hardness. Afterwards his whole palette brightens and his dynamic vision of the universe tends to express itself in pinks, limpid blues, light greens and milky whites. From this it should not be concluded, however, that the coloring of Alechinsky's present canvases is reassuringly gentle. Its paradoxical range, including, as it does,

colors which at times are reminiscent of those used by confectioners, somehow manages to create glazed and disquieting combinations which are in perfect concordance with an anguishing brush technique. We believe it was worth stressing the fact that Alechinsky's vitalism is far from being seductive or only optimistic. The eternal vital urge that animates nature by no means leads the painter to a simpleminded pantheism. As Alechinsky conceives it, nature hides a certain sadism. The grim humor that the artist expresses in his drawing emphasizes the deadly aspect of the movement that carries us along inexorably. And Alechinsky's art has in fact a markedly pessimistic cast and can irritate us by its crudeness, if not by its deliberate choice of a certain ugliness. Its authenticity, however, is no less moving on this account for anyone who does not shrink before the cry of truth.



153.  
Pierre ALECHINSKY  
The Polyglots, 1959-1960  
100 x 160, oil on linen.  
Geirlant collection, Ghent.



We said above that the human face affirms itself more markedly in Pierre Alechinsky's most recent works. A hallucinated individual seems to burst forth in the midst of the destructive work of nature. Far from softening the strident coloration or the feverish composition of the canvases, this, if anything, further intensifies their truth. In his large-format drawings we find a less tormented artist, and a less complicated one. The aesthetic values are more noticeable here: the artist takes delight in following the lines, the folds and wrinkles of the sheets of white or brown paper

which he has first crumpled. In doing so he evokes a more harmonious universe than that of his tortured canvases. These sketches would prove, if there were any need of it, of what poetic overtones Alechinsky's work is capable. His poetic nature, for the matter, reveals itself also in the unwonted humor of the titles that give a kind of new dimension to his works. Poetry and humor by no means obliterate what often shocks in Alechinsky's canvases. Their numerous qualities however situate them in a paradoxical perspective. It can perhaps be said that everything about this young artist



154.  
Pierre ALECHINSKY  
The Polyglots, 1960  
100 x 150, laquered canvas.  
Albert Naggar collection, Paris



is paradoxal. To begin with, the immense talent, both aggressive and fundamentally original, by which he is able to evoke a universe founded on the eternal vitality of nature.

## DUDANT, ROGER

Born in Laplaigne (Tournaisis) in 1929. A student at the Academy of Fine Arts of Tournai, then at the Ecole nationale supérieure d'architecture et des arts décoratifs (E.N.S.A.A.D.) in Brussels (Prof. Paul Delvaux). Travels to Italy (1954) and Spain (1955). Visited Poland in 1957 with Jan Burssens.

Awarded the Jeune Peinture Belge prize in 1953. — Third mention for the Carnegie Foundation Prize (Pittsburgh) in

1955 and shared with Landuyt the award of the Fourth International Black and White Exhibition in Lugano (1956). — In 1956 was one of the Belgian painters selected for the International Guggenheim Prize. — One-man shows in Brussels, Liège, Antwerp, Paris, New York. — Participated in various international shows: Congress for the Freedom of Culture (Rome, Brussels, Paris, 1955), Peinture Belge d'Aujourd'hui (Poland, 1957), Venice Biennial (1958), São Paulo Biennial (1959), Biennale des Jeunes in Paris (1959), etc. — Works of his in the Belgian museums as well as in Pittsburgh, São Paulo, Lugano. — Has lived in Péruwelz (Hainaut) since 1953.

BIBLIOGRAPHY : L.-L. Sosset, « Les Beaux-Arts », Brussels, November 28, 1958 and November 2, 1962.

However consciously it may be emancipated from the descriptive register, figuration in ROGER DUDANT's work is far from being a discarded or supplementary element. Job sites, factories, railroad yards, marshes,



155.

Pierre ALECHINSKY

Dark story, 1960

99 x 149, laquered canvas.

Mrs Raymond-Cartier collection, Paris.





156.

Roger DUDANT

Light on the town, 1960

98 x 148, oil on linen.

Private collection.

empty lots, road networks and wooded areas regularly contribute to the plastic inspiration. The field that he has made his own can be recognized from the door of his studio, in the very heart of the industrial and agricultural Hainaut region where he was born. But these analogies go hand in hand with a selective operation, difficult to conceive independently of the abstractive incitements which constitute the underlying texture of the subject at the same time that they stimulate the themes of arrangement and especially of cristallization. Dudant readily assimilates reality — which is in fact reduced to humble pretexts, to balanced relations of planes and linear strokes, to certain effects of lighting, to certain rhythms of orga-

nization on which the design of the painting, its fundamental harmony and, to be sure, its restful animation depend.

From the outset of his career it was evident that he was not one to be carried away by passion, extravagance or caprice. Calm rectilinear networks, prudently spaced, accompanied the distribution of hues, limited to dominant scales of grays and russets discreetly associated in their blue-tinged shades and their ochred modulations. Having grown accustomed to this well-thought-out repertory, purified of all materiality, always of even quality, one was tempted to conclude that his art was tending to reduce itself to a formula of virtuosity, whereas his successive works represented



a unitary sequence elaborated with quiet perseverance, proof against conflicts of tendencies and based on a series of deliberate, closely related transitions.

One need only isolate canvases executed at intervals of a few years to gauge the progress they reflect. Thus we see the plane structures and the symmetrical arrangements of the composition becoming animated by tiny parallel hatchings, then these graphic titillations acquiring an assured autonomy as they discover themselves to possess a poetic cadence, then oblique breaches of light intervening to suggest sudden spatial perspectives, and finally the modulating streaks building up to light impastos in an increasingly bright

chromatic context. These are general characteristics distributed over a succession of homogeneous phases in which are manifested as many states of an interpretative sensibility in relation to one or another prudently assimilated acquisition.

Account must also be taken, in the light of future developments, of the fact that color, kept in reserve for a long time, is asserting itself in furtive flights of reds and yellows amid these highly interiorized landscapes, bathed in silent solitude — landscapes whose very emptiness constitutes the radiant kernel in which the mental order and the sense perceptions join with delicacy in the act of abstraction.



157.  
Roger DUDANT  
Twilight, 1955  
111 x 153, oil on linen.  
Private collection, Brussels.

## ZIMMERMANN, JACQUES

Born in Hoboken-lez-Anvers in 1929.

Exhibited for the first time in Brussels in 1952. — A sojourn in the Congo in 1956. — Joined the Phases movement in 1958 and has participated in its events abroad. — One-man shows in Elizabethville (1956), New York (1960), Copenhagen (1961).

For five years JACQUES ZIMMERMANN has been practicing a painting of complex structure, oniric in content, which is situated on the confines of the realm of invented forms and of an imaginary landscape. The revelation he had in 1954 of Hartung's graphic trajectories, as well as the memory of equatorial vegetations, are the source of the fundamental baroquism of his vision. The latter has its general reference in spear-shaped elements swept in rotating rhythms in which an unreal space is hollowed out containing fantastic morphologies which are not devoid of affinities with those of Götz, of Bertini and Weichberger, or even of Matta. Minutely worked, Zimmermann's canvases testify, in turn, to the possibilities of metamorphosis of the poetics of surrealism, in a period whose plastic universe is dominated, if not shaped, by the innumerable virtualities of abstraction.

## CLAUS, HUGO

Born in Bruges, April 29, 1929. Poet, novelist and playwright, but also a draftsman and painter. As poet and draftsman, he contributed to the review «Tijd en Mens» and to the Cobra movement.

As a painter he took part in the «Vitalità nell'Arte» exhibitions in 1959. — Various exhibitions in Brussels, Amsterdam, Venice and Recklinghausen. — He was a candidate for the Marzotto Prize in 1962.

BIBLIOGRAPHY : Gaétan Picon, Introduction à l'exposition Hugo Claus, Brussels 1958. — Philippe d'Arschot, «Hugo Claus», in «Quadrant», X., 1961, Brussels.

HUGO CLAUS did not come to drawing and painting only after achieving fame as a poet, novelist and playwright. He had drawn since he could hold a pencil and painted since he could hold a brush and from the very beginning expressed himself as much in lines and colors as in words. Yet here precisely lies the difference. Poetry, and in a certain sense the novel, are essentially arts in which one expresses oneself. Painting, on the other hand, creates an autonomous object: the canvas with its own conditions and possibilities. It is not, to be sure, in this that the essential

difference between literature and the plastic arts lies. Painting also essentially expresses its author, as does the poem, which is also an autonomous whole. But in any case, in the work of Hugo Claus, the difference between the two arts manifests itself in a flagrant way.

At least it does so in the first stages of the artist's evolution. After having, around 1950, participated in the Cobra movement, with canvases whose humor and bold contrasts of colors attracted attention to him, he slipped imperceptibly toward exercises which seemed to be the reflections of his innermost sentiments. Those sentiments could be read in clear on his canvases. They were either the fear — all too justified — of modern armaments, or sexual obsessions. With a fierce spontaneity, and in violent contrasts of dark red, purplish pink and black, he created cosmonauts bearing atom bombs, or male and female sexual organs, in canvases as poignant as would be public confessions. Later Hugo Claus passed to abstraction and at the same time his desire to express himself became visibly attenuated. The new canvases remained just as dramatic and tumultuous, but allowing for the fact that they sometimes verged on the decorative, as in certain experiments based on graphic characters, generally speaking they were more mature than formerly as to their complex of lines and colors. There was first a series of gouaches, often adorned with silver, which were tributes to Jonathan Swift. Then came pictures of immense format in which gold was introduced, a ringing gold often contrasted with black.

Wild and tumultuous: such are the terms that always come to mind when one comments on the painter Hugo Claus. He seems hardly to weigh the pros and cons when he paints. He empties his colors on the canvas in a spasm. The result is either of startling beauty, artistically speaking, or else so turbulent, so jerky and contrasting, that Gaétan Picon has rightly described them as hemorrhages.

## VAN LANGE, GISELE

Born in Etterbeek December 26, 1926. Studied ancient classics at the Emile Max Lycée in Brussels. Drawing and painting courses at the Académie des Beaux-Arts in Brussels.

1960 : Single-artist show at the Galerie Camion in Paris. — 1961 : Participated in the Paris Biennial. — Single-artist shows at the Galerie Vendôme in Brussels. — Has taken part in numerous group exhibits.





158.

Marc VERSTOCT  
Composition II, 1959-1960  
115 x 145, oil on linen.  
Private collection.

BIBLIOGRAPHY : M. Courtois, « Les Beaux-Arts », April 13, 1960. — R. Vrinat, « Le Monde de l'Architecture et des Beaux-Arts », No. 9, 1960. « L'Information », April 22, 1960.

GISELE VAN LANGE has come to abstract expression through a slow and progressive simplification of the landscape and a non-figurative synthesis of the subject. A free interpretation of reality and a dynamic and

active pictorial approach lead to an abstract expressionism, in which broad planes and enormous brushstrokes spread in a ample movement on the canvas. The whole forms a harmonious and balanced theme which suggests an open space, from which dense obstacles and soft depths, solid structures and vaporous slopes can be perceived. First marked by a pre-

dominance of richly hued greens and blues, the coloration has evolved toward the browns and sensual mauves. The liveliness of the rhythm is based on an implicit and serenely constructed framework. It is along the path of spontaneous expression that Gisèle Van Lange has shown the most marked progress in recent years.

## GANZEVOORT, WYBRAND

Born in Ghent May 31, 1930. A member of the G 58 group.  
Exhibitions in Antwerp, Ghent and Brussels.

The first canvases by WYBRAND GANZEVOORT that we saw formed an attractive kaleidoscope in which the touches of color fitted into an oval, one inside another. Since then the artist, probably under the influence of the young Italian painters, has turned to a more decorative and more refined approach. The same is true of his young fellow-citizen, G. Mees, who already displays great mastery in the white and gray tonalities.

## VERSTOCKT, MARC

Born in Lokeren in 1930. Studied at the University of Ghent, at the Academy and at the Higher Institute of Fine Arts in Antwerp.

Many exhibitions in Europe and the United States. — Author of the essay, « En waar liggen de toetsstenen ? » published in the review « Nul », April 4, 1962.

BIBLIOGRAPHY : Hugo Raes, in « Kroniek van Kunst en Kultuur », Amsterdam, June 1959. — Ivo Michiels, in « 4 Soli », 1959. — Hertha Wescher, in « Cimaise », 1959. — Jo Delahaut, in « Aujourd'hui », No. 21, 1959.

MARC VERSTOCKT's art, varied in its unity, is easy to define : it is an art of dark colors, an art of the night and of darkness. Verstockt seems fascinated by the absence of light, as others are attracted on the contrary by the glare of the sun and radiant tonalities. But one should not let oneself be deceived by this apparent uniformity, by this point of view which seems exclusive. In reality what we have here is an art prepared with an expert hand : numerous condiments enter into it. In this refined technique, tonalities such as mat or shiny black, midnight blue and dark brown

play an important part. The composition is scarcely perceptible, for the volumes emerge vaguely from the surrounding darkness. But delicate shades of tonality can be noted, a play of light, at first unperceived and enveloped in mystery, a fascinating depth and a technical finishing treatment so varied that at times it appears almost baroque.

It is this last characteristic which is particularly manifest when one examines Verstockt's work more closely. The choice of colors — and of certain new ingredients which are mixed into them — important as it is, is no more so than the precise way of applying them to the canvas, for Verstockt's works closely resemble reliefs, the forms of which show not only their subdued tints but also their contour and their volume. It can be gathered from this how startling the effect of these canvases can be when the sunlight touches them or floods them.

The whole effect is most often that of a wild pattern of tropical creepers, submerged in water, from which oval pearls having a dim luminousness detach themselves. One is reminded of the magical pictures of the ocean depths photographed without any flash to rend the spectral night.

For when we approach Verstockt's work we are bound to fall back on nocturnal visions, on visions of darkness. We are minded of the mystery of what escapes the light, while remaining in contact with the life which scintillates in the depths of invisible mirrors.

## LAHAUT, PIERRE

Born in Brussels in 1931. In 1957 joined the Jeunes Figuratifs Belges group, from which he separated the following year. Co-founder, with the painters Londot, Warrand and the sculptor Roulin, of the Namur group Axe 59. Study trips to Holland and France.

One-man shows in Brussels and Paris. — Invited to the second Biennale des Jeunes (Paris, 1961). — His studio at Flawinne-lez-Namur.

After completing his training, PIERRE LAHAUT abandoned description and figuration and turned to lyrical abstraction. The rich and expressive use of paint, for which he had already shown a feeling in his earlier work, became an important feature in the conception of his paintings, which after 1958 assume the character of a perceptive synthesis of the secret emotions felt in the presence of nature.





159.  
Pierre LAHAUT  
Homage to my wife, 1962  
162 x 130, oil on linen.  
Private collection.

From this point on the colored masses, of which the speed of the brush strokes constitutes the essence, acquire a turbulent density in which the vital energy that animates it abounds. The painting becomes a means of laying bare complex emotional states, with the inner sensation giving itself over to a dynamic graphic expression which becomes integrated in the texture of the painting.

Lahaut's determination to forge a firm place for himself, in the contemporary version of styles of exaltation and effusion, led him to be suspicious of the primacy

of improvisation and to concentrate instead on clarity and harmony. In the last analysis, it is this tension toward passion held in leash, controlled by sharp resonances, which ensures him a place among the very worth while "new wave" painters of Belgium.

#### BULCKE, GUY

Born in 1931 in Antwerp, by the name of Van den Bulcke. Studied at the Academy, then at the Higher Institute of Fine Arts of his native city (1946-1954).



160.  
Charles DRYBERGH  
Painting No. 3, 1962  
199 x 180, oil on linen.  
Private collection.



Awarded the Jeune Peinture Belge prize in 1954. — One-man shows in Brussels, Antwerp, Schiedam, Luxembourg, Milan, Paris, Stuttgart. — Has participated, besides, in group exhibitions in Belgium and other countries. — Study trips to Italy (1952) and Paris (1954). — Likewise practices engraving.

An expressionist in Permeke's lineage, and initially inspired by the structure of boats, GUY BULCKE very soon scrambled figurative allusions and proceeded to drown them in a flow of unctuous and mottled pastes, spread with the knife in thick, hurried daubs, dominated by ochres, grays, dark greens and blacks. Since 1957 he has executed lively pictorial improvisations whose colorful leaps denote the involvement of the young artist in a feverish activity. His work progresses with a free exuberance, drawing upon the resources of a variegated palette.

#### LEBLANC, WALTER

Born in Antwerp in 1932. A student at the Academy and the Advanced Institute of Fine Arts of his native city.

Began to show his work in 1956 in group exhibitions. — A founding member of the G 58 group (Hessenhuis). — One-man shows in Antwerp, Brussels and other places, including Zürich, Grenchen and Milan.

Having paid his tribute to a figurative initiation, WALTER LEBLANC devoted himself to the analysis of the resources offered by the interpretative use of material: reliefs and collages, integrated objects, monochrome rhythmic structures, effects of repetition, optical effects achieved by means of plastified strips, etc. The international exhibitions of experimental art held at the Hessenhuis in Antwerp stimulated his experimentation, which has continued to produce fresh effects especially through the ingenuity and the charm of fine craftsmanship.

#### DRYBERGH, CHARLES

Born in Brussels in 1932.

Jeune peinture belge prize in 1961. Has taken part in group exhibitions in Ghent, Verviers, Antwerp, Brussels, Charleroi, Ostend, Düsseldorf, Courtrai, Lausanne, Tournai, Amsterdam, The Hague, Rotterdam, etc. — In 1956, 1958, 1961 and 1963,

individual exhibitions in Brussels, at the Le Zodiaque Gallery, where he also exhibited with Van Anderlecht and Gentils in 1960.

BIBLIOGRAPHY : Maurits Bilcke, « De Gazet van Antwerpen », December 21, 1960, November 30, 1961, February 6, 1963. — Jean Dypréau, Catalogue of the Le Zodiaque exhibition, 1963. — Marcel Duchateau, « De Linie », February 9, 1962.

CHARLES DRYBERGH had to live through a whole dramatic period before he could muster the physical and moral strength to liberate his talent to the full.

We can agree with Jean Dypréau when he writes that he detected in the sketches made by Drybergh during a stay of several weeks in a hospital the reflection of his admiration for Goya, whose precepts remain still valid today. Like the Spanish master, Drybergh has realized that "he could free himself entirely from nature and describe forms and rhythms which existed only in his imagination." In nature he saw only light and dark forms, planes advancing and withdrawing, relief and perspective. His attention could not be distracted by the lines and the details that his eye hardly discerned. "His brush must see neither more, nor better, than himself."

The example of Goya, Dypréau adds, revealed to Drybergh the secret paths of abstraction and, at the same time, a sense of revolt. The imperious need to liberate himself carried him into a luminous, aerated, living and real space. It threw him into a great creative activity: I paint, therefore I live. The more vehement the pictorial activity is, the more intense life will be. Whence, with very few exceptions, great canvases, painted with the full swing of the arm, with great provocative gestures. The terms "action painting" and "abstract expressionism" here come quite naturally to one's pen. However, even though Drybergh was stubbornly bent upon discovering himself, and committed his whole personality, at times with temerity, to this quest, what characterizes his work is not just psychic automatism without any rational limitation and irrespective of any aesthetic and moral preoccupation, as André Breton defines it. His work, in fact, reveals an innate and typically Flemish sense of balance between form and color, an atavistic sentiment which clearly indicates to the artist up to what point "he can go too far".

In his most recent works, Drybergh demonstrates a perfect selfmastery. The immense black lines integrated into a grayed or blued background are on the one hand the index of a real aptness for lyrical expression, and on the other hand the proof of an unceasing attention to

the search for the sign that best corresponds to the inner vision. The work is therefore not only a symbolic manifestation in favor of "freedom, in a world in which freedom has ceased to have any other value than that of a political slogan," but also and above all, an act fully translating the pictorial essence into purified signs, which are like the gigantic alphabet of a secret writing. And along this path Drybergh has obtained remarkable results.

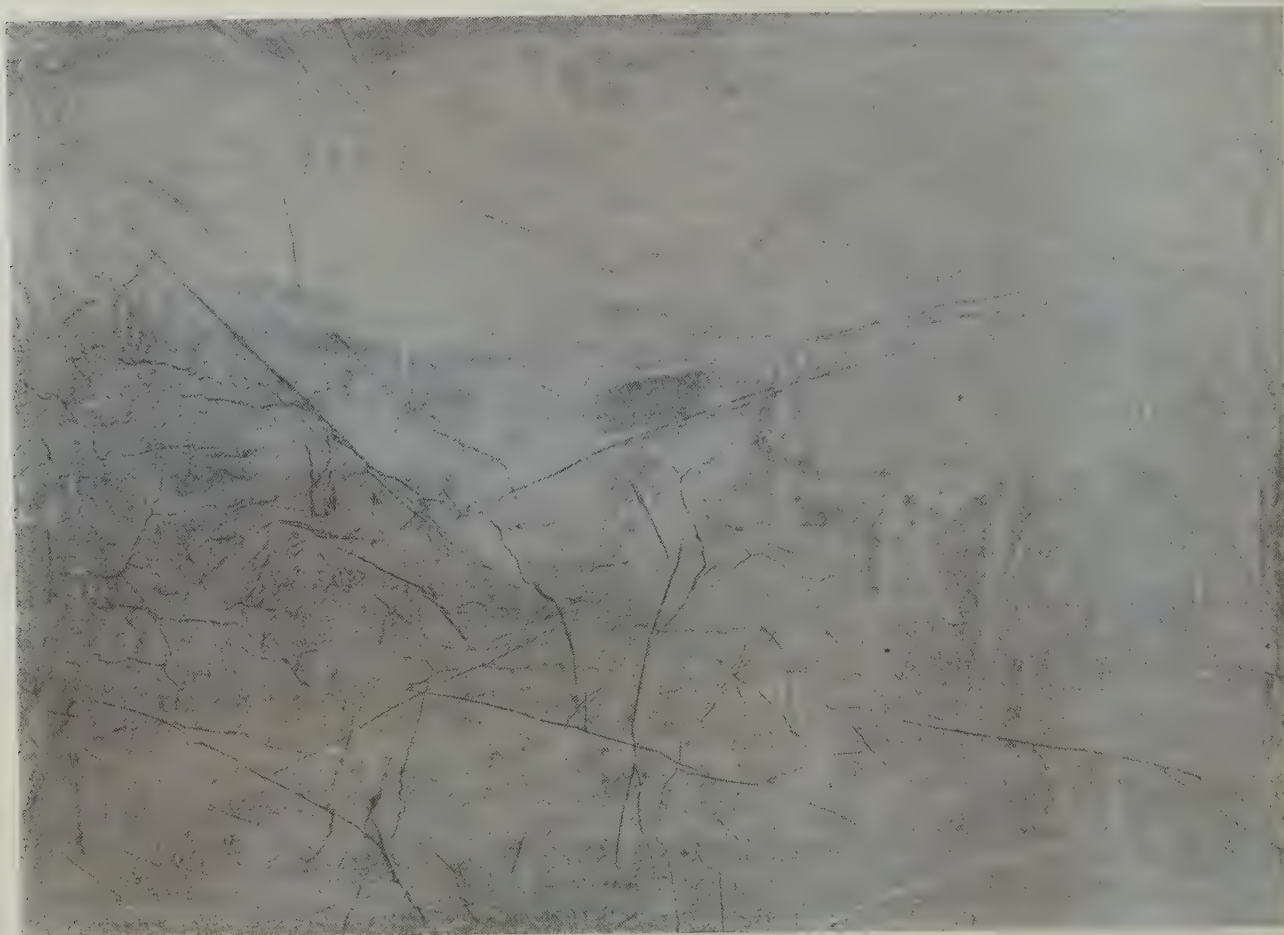
## VANERMEN, WALTER

Born in Antwerp June 27, 1932. Self-taught. Member of the G 58 Hessenhuis circle of Antwerp, and of the Nouvelle Ecole Européenne group in Lausanne.

1958 : Exhibited with Jef Verheyen at the Château Middelheim in Antwerp and with the G 58 circle at the Hessenhuis in the same city, from November to January. — 1960 : Exhibited at the Hessenhuis, single-artist show in November, then with the Nouvelle Ecole Européenne. — 1961 : Exhibited at the Galerie Kasper in Lausanne with the Nouvelle Ecole Européenne, under the sponsorship of the Prix Suisse de Peinture. — Exhibited in Bochum, and at the New Vision Centre Gallery in London with the G 58 circle. — 1962 : One-man show at the Hessenhuis in Antwerp.

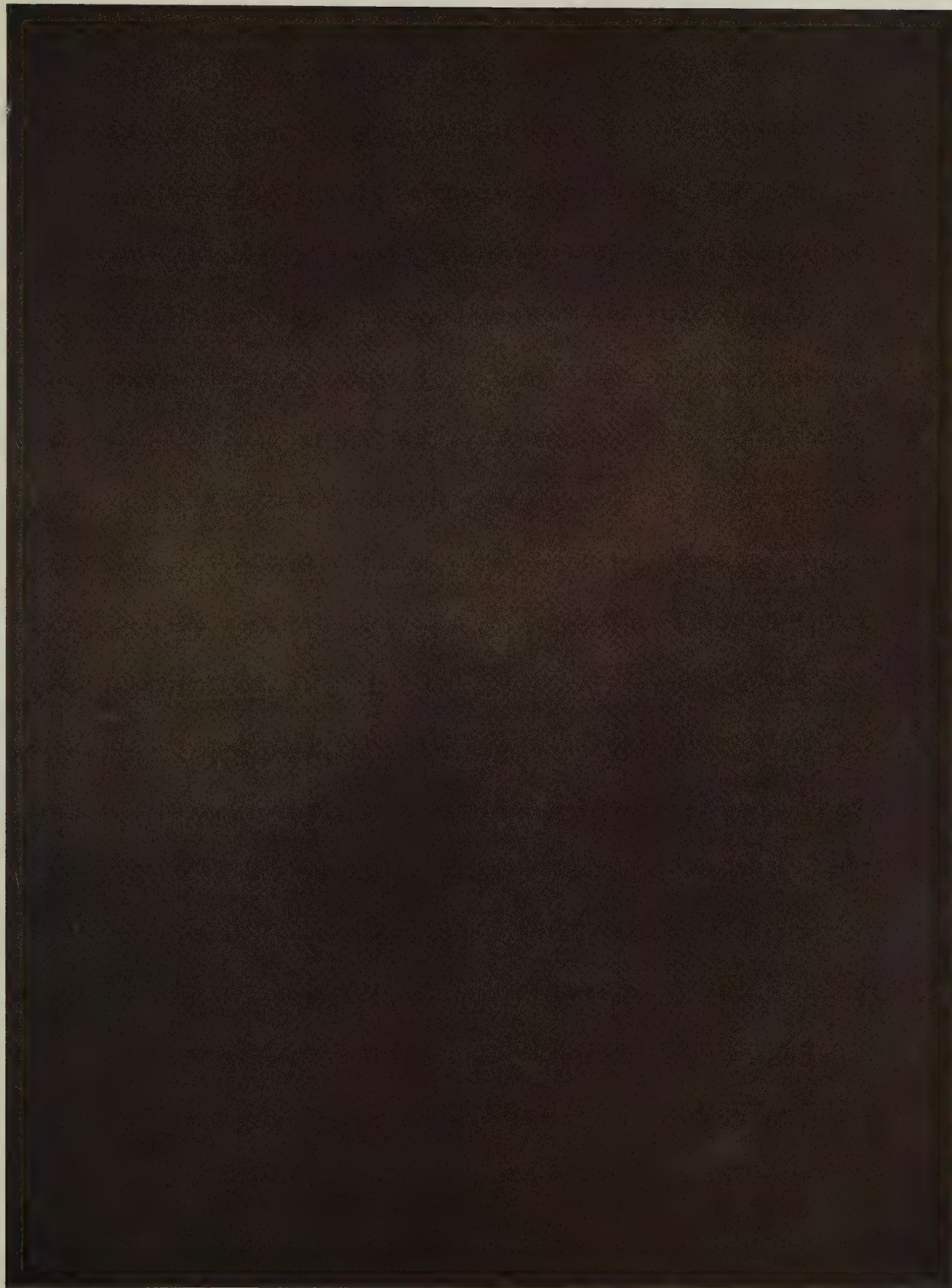
BIBLIOGRAPHY : Marc Callewaert, « De Gazet van Antwerpen », August 27, 1958 ; February 9, 1960 ; December 1, 1960. — Ivo Michiels, « Belgische Radio en Televisie, Onze Kunstkaleidoscoop », August 28, 1958 ; November 28, 1960. — H. Waterschoot, « De Standaard », December 2, 1960. — Maurits Bilcke, « Belgische Radio en Televisie, Onze Kunstkaleidoscoop », December 12, 1960 ; « De Gazet van Antwerpen », June 28, 1961. — R. Vaneigem, « Aujourd'hui », Paris, June 1960. — Francine-C. Legrand, « Quadrum VIII », 1960.

WALTER VANERMEN was first influenced by the painters of materials who began to show their work in Spain



161.  
Jef VERHEYEN  
Panasea, 1960, 46 x 62, body-colour.  
Private collection.





162.  
Jef VERHEYEN  
Flemish space, 1961  
130 x 97, oil on linen.  
Private collection.

some ten years ago, and by the impressive results achieved in the field of aerial photography. The earth's crust, changing, irregular, and contrasted, is reflected in detail or in an inclusive way in the texture of Vanermen's work. The coloration is rather monochrome as to fundamental tonalities, but delicately shaded as to details. Vanermen's most recent canvases are much more lyrical and dynamic. An immense sponge, soaked with a brown liquid, seems to have swept the canvas with the movement of a windshield-wiper. This movement could be interpreted as having a fanatical intent: that of seeking to know one's (the painter's) own nature and of discovering the nature of matter, which one wishes to bend to the expression of a vision, personal and at times fortuitous, of the dynamism of the cosmos.

#### VERHEYEN, JEF

Born in Ichtegem July 6, 1932. Studied at the Antwerp Academy and Higher Institute of Fine Arts. Studied philosophy at the Em. Vandervelde Institute in the same city. Met Fontana in 1958 and became acquainted with his monochrome work. Co-founder of G 58 and of the Nouvelle Ecole Flamande.

Numerous exhibitions in Europe, in the United States and in the Congo. — Took part in 1960 in the Monochrome Malerei exhibition in Leverkusen. — Author of the essay « Pour une peinture non-plastique », Antwerp 1961.

BIBLIOGRAPHY : Nic van Bruggen in « De Vlaamse Gids », Brussels, January 1962.

Since his debut, JEF VERHEYEN's painting has been based on a total ascesis of color and of form. Indeed one has the impression that this Fleming, born in Western Flanders and living in Antwerp, either will not or cannot participate in any way in the debauches of color in which his compatriots indulge as though by nature. Where modern painters, like Louis Van Lint or Pierre Alechinsky, let the colors clash with a passionate violence, Jef Verheyen instinctively limits himself to a single tone, thus becoming one of the first monochrome painters of Western Europe. He was probably preconditioned to this by the conjunction of his apprenticeship at the Higher Institute of Fine Arts of Antwerp and the long-pursued study of philosophy, psychology and oriental mysticism. Moreover, his thoughtful, meditative, rather shy nature must have deeply influenced his

desire, ever more intense, to express himself in a single color, and almost without having recourse to form.

After various experiments, in which he composed surfaces in gold and silver, sometimes covered with nylon or netting, Jef Verheyen turned to the monochrome, that is to the most original synthesis of the figurative, the geometrical abstract and even the non-formal. Consider a canvas like *Flemish Space*, reproduced here. A single color is evenly spread. As Jef Verheyen appears, up to now, to have a marked preference for subdued tones, if not for dark shades — never do we find in his work the violent effects of color of a Roger Raveel — his works show only the blue of the darkest night, the brown of the gloomiest autumn, the gray of the most dismal rainy night. Thus this tendency would seem to have a kinship with Malevitch's white or black surfaces, and in this context one might use the term geometrical abstraction, were it not for the shades of light, the subtle gradations of a single tint, not strictly arranged, but scattered with poetic fantasy over the whole canvas. Is it, then, a non-formal art with a single tonality? Not quite, for abstraction seems precisely absent here. Columns of smoke rise, clouds blend with space or become menacing, vaporous peaks stand out vaguely against high, smooth skies. The monochrome canvas comes to life. And presently it resembles more and more a vast twilight sky, with the gray firmament of the last seconds preceding the first ray of dawn bursting upon the earth. The non-figurative is pushed back: the world has returned, by paths that could never have been suspected.

What Jef Verheyen offers us is in fact an art of mystical essence. The mind of the viewer becomes engulfed in it, as the Zen Buddhist loses himself in the infinite contemplation of Nothingness. This mystical character in no way diminishes the plastic qualities of Verheyen's work. On the contrary: the monochrome, which he raises to a principle, emphasizes his exceptional pictorial qualities. No better proof of these could be found than in the fact that the degree of intellectual concentration, of depth and of abstraction (in the mystical sense of the word, this time) varies from work to work. A still further proof would be found in certain canvases of his in which the suggestion of some mysterious sign seems to evoke human essence anew.

Jef Verheyen's brilliant mastery comes out, in another context, in the watercolors he brought back in 1960 from his trip to Greece. We reproduce one of these, entitled *Panasea*. In a range of colors almost as limited as that of his large canvases, he here evokes the paradis-





163.  
Camiel VAN BREEDAM  
Kermis, at Boom, 1962  
100 x 100, oil on wood.  
The artist collection.





164.  
Jacques LACOMBLEZ  
A Cornwall night, 1962  
116 x 89, oil on linen.  
Private collection.



iac atmosphere of the distant islands of the Greek-Turkish frontier, where the first Hellenic civilization is said to have been born.

## WITTEVRONGEL, ROGER

Born in Blankenberge April 23, 1933. Studied at the Normal School of his native town and at the Middle Normal School in Ghent (plastic arts section). Student at the Ghent Fine-Arts School (painting, drawing, engraving and modeling).

1958 : First one-man show at the Kunst- en Letterenkring in Ghent. — 1960 : Participated in the Contraste international exhibition in Blankenberge. — One-man show at the Drieghe Gallery in Wetteren. — 1961 : One-man show at the Le Zodiaque Gallery in Brussels. — One-man show of drawings at the Rotterdamse Kunstkring in Rotterdam. — Participated in the Forum 61 in Ghent. Also in the Youth Biennial in Paris, 1961, and at the westvlaamse Kunst exhibitions in Holland and Germany. — Wittevrongel teaches drawing and manual training at the Middle School in Ghent.

BIBLIOGRAPHY : Roland Jooris, « Vooruit », December 1960. « Rotterdammer », May 1961. — Frans Duister, « Het Nieuwe Dagblad » May 25, 1961. — Maurits Blicke, « De Gazet van Antwerpen », March 1, 1961. — Hubert Colleje, « La Métropole », March 1, 1961. — U. Van de Voorde, « De Standaard », March 3, 1961 ; « De Volksgazet », March 6, 1961. — L.-L. Sosset, « Les Beaux-Arts », March 3, 1961.

ROGER WITTEVRONGEL was for some time influenced by the surrealist inspiration which also strongly marked a part of the work of such painters as Frits Van den Berghe and Landuyt. The canvases of this period show skeletons and monstrous figures, wings and bird's heads, branches and fish, bones and roots, plants and rocks, shells and tumors, swellings, entrails and claws... A world in decomposition slowly pushed to destruction and death by a frightful metamorphosis.

As in the case of Teszlack, this metamorphosis gradually destroyed the figure and the object. It finally led to abstract visions, just as fantastic and impressive as the preceding ones, but sharper and more serene. The heavy matter became purified too, while the composition became more and more liberated from anecdotic details. The image breathed calm and power. Such, among others, are the compositions in black-and-white which seem to show gigantic abstract flowers. In the most recent canvases color resumes its sway and the painter suggests spaces having cosmic dimensions. Considered as a whole, the work of this young painter is by no means lacking in variety : exotic plants and sepals which open in a wide fan, delicately colored and transparent spaces which suggest unfathomable depths. The black-and-white drawings testify to Wittevrongel's

imaginative power. His art, metaphysical and phantasmagorical in inspiration, is rich with promise, with possibilities of development which it will be exciting to watch at close hand.

## LACOMBLEZ, JACQUES

Born in Brussels in 1934. Was given guidance by Henri Heerbrant who exerted a decisive influence on him.

Has exhibited since 1952. — In 1957 joined the Phases movement, founded in Paris by the poet Ed. Jaguer, and took part in its events abroad. — In 1958 he in turn founded the review « Edda ». — Took part in the International Exhibition of Surrealism (New York, 1960). — One-man shows in Brussels, Buenos Aires (1960) and Copenhagen (1962). — His work as a painter is matched by an interesting activity as etcher and poet.

This artist's paintings do not proceed from a rigorist temperament or conception. JACQUES LACOMBLEZ's unrealism is stimulated by the fantastic and its esoteric ramifications. His artistic gifts, which were extremely precocious, awakened under the influence of surrealism, in landscapes of legend and of mirage. The discovery of Klee, of Max Ernst, of Yves Tanguy, the passion for music, the reading of the German romantics, led him by 1954 to a more secret art, animated by symbolic attributes and metaphysical allusions.

Thus conditioned, he persistently turned in the direction of psycho-mental evocations which reflect his poetic experience of life, sensitized as he is to anxiety and anguish, as well as his gifts as a colorist which in turn are marked by the well-nigh obsessional role that he attributes to symbols. The saturated blue that permeates his *Nuit de Cornouailles*, reproduced herewith, corresponds to a visual appropriation of Wagnerian romanticism and becomes in a sense, for this music-loving painter, the equivalent of an auditive image or of some theatrical stage set.

The titles of his paintings themselves, as though projected from within, testify to the fact that the operation of the mind occurs, with him, beyond the iridescent spectrums of the visible, in a continuous gliding which leads from the plastic imagination to its mysterious subjective meanings. In this realm where the dream readily ties in with the evocation of a hinter-world, this artist of barely thirty shows a sureness and levelheadedness rare at his age.

## VAN GYSEGEM, PAUL

Born in Berlare June 6, 1935.

Exhibitions in Ghent and Wetteren.

BIBLIOGRAPHY : Roland Joris, « Paul Van Gysegem », in « De Vlaamse Gids », Brussels, May 1962.

The art of PAUL VAN GYSEGEM is of the kind that develops slowly. And in his work the viewer can witness a progressive coming to maturity. They show a certain kinship with Corneille's canvases : in the composition we find the same repeated obsession with the city, a closed, capricious and yet balanced entity. But his palette, based primarily on red and its complementary tonalities, gives to Van Gysegem's work a wholly red-tinged warmth, which the more deliberate, more subtle art of the Dutch painter neither has nor seeks. Paul Van Gysegem shows us, moreover, how his volumes tend progressively toward unity, and it is difficult to predict what direction the evolution of his art, marked by conscientiousness and gravity, will follow.

## MEES, GUY

Born in Antwerp June 23, 1935. Studied at the Academy and at the Higher Institute of Fine Arts of his native city.

Exhibits in Antwerp, Ghent and Milan. — Represented in Belgian and foreign collections.

## VAN BREEDAM, CAMIEL

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Born in Boom June 29, 1936. 1955-1957 : Studies at the Athénée Royal in Boom and at the Ecole normale moyenne in Ghent. Taught plastic arts.

1957 : Group exhibit : Celbeton, Termonde. — 1958 : First one-man show at the Les Contemporains Gallery in Brussels and group exhibit with *Peintures belges d'Aujourd'hui* in Diest. — 1959 : Prix de la Critique exhibition in Charleroi. — Single-artist shows at the Aumann Gallery in Düsseldorf and at the Galerie Saint-Laurent in Brussels. — 1960 : One-man show at the Hessenhuis in Antwerp. — Meysmans-Van Breedam exhibition at the Les Contemporains Gallery in Brussels, at the Veranneman Salon in Courtrai. — Also exhibited with the 't Venster group in Rotterdam. — Represented at the Brussels Museum of Modern Art.

BIBLIOGRAPHY : Maurits Bilcke, « De Gazet van Antwerpen », February 18, 1960. — « Belgische Radio en Televisie, Onze Kunstkalendroscoop », February 1960 — Philippe d'Arshot, Invitation to the Hessenhuis exhibition, Antwerp, January 30, 1960 ; « Les Beaux-Arts », February 22, 1957 — Piët Sterckx, « De Nieuwe Gazet », June 15, 1960 — Franz de Bruyn, « De Nieuwe Gazet », December 7, 1958

CAMIEL VAN BREEDAM was completely unknown when, hardly more than twenty years old, he attracted attention to his original talent by winning the Jeune Peinture Belge prize in 1956. The interest that he aroused on this occasion was fully deserved, even though his works were not paintings in the technical and traditional sense of the term. His materials were composed of a paste, gray, beige, or brown, into which were stuck or arranged bicycle chains, small steel rods, keys, forks, and other junk or objects of everyday use. The nearly geometric arrangement of these objects taken out of their original context in no way prevented the combination of elements into which they were integrated from exerting a magic attraction.

The young artist has remained faithful to these materials, and has even widened their range by adding steel plate, typewriter, and computing machine parts, automobile and signal parts, etc. These unusual objects furnish, so to speak, prefabricated plastic themes. Because they are made mechanically, it quite often happens that they form whole series which are worked into the plastic work. Sometimes they afford the opportunity of creating a vertical-horizontal composition; at other times, as with the latest bicycle chains, they bring the circle or the oval into the foreground. Strangely enough, these materials diverted from their function preserve a part of their initial authenticity. Is this effect the result of oppositions, of interactions, or of harmonies ? It may be all this and something else, for in the end the work of art has become an entity living its own life and displaying features that are unlike any others.

Certain works of Van Breedam's are composed solely of a paste chiseled with parallel lines or an irregular circle. The material, rugged as a burned skin, and hard like the baked clay of bricks, stimulates the sense of touch. Although the coloration is very sober, it is rich in delicate shades, while the light, by accentuating the relief, tempts the eye to look at the work from various angles.

Thus it is by limiting his vision and making use of a rich range of materials that Van Breedam has come increasingly closer to the essence of a mode of expression which he has marked with the seal of an authentic originality.



## PATOOR, POL

Born in Courtrai, August 6, 1939. Scientific studies in Courtrai, Middle Normal school (plastic arts) in Brussels. Art teacher in the lower Middle School.

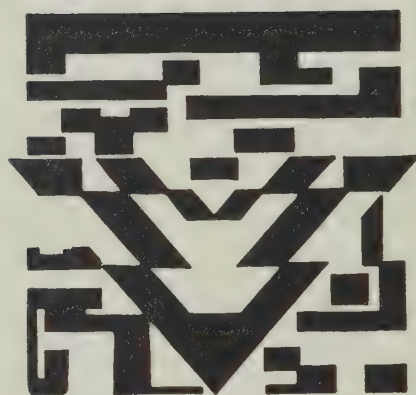
Group exhibits : Westvlaamse Kunstkring, Courtrai and Bruges, 1959 ; Groep Dwergen, Courtrai, 1959 ; Journées culturelles provinciales, Ostend, Bruges, Hasselt, Holland, 1960-1961 ; L'Art contemporain en Flandre occidentale Hessenhuis, Antwerp, 1961 ; Kunst aus West-Flandern von Permeke bis heute, Westphalia, 1961.

POL PATOOR is a very young artist, in whose work the influence of Flemish figurative expressionism can be

recognized by the heaviness and the sensuality of the abstract forms and planes. The grainy and crusty paint quality gives to certain of his canvases the exact look of old crumbling walls. These works, which seem to contain dark forebodings, evoke elementary powers which are trying to become settled and stabilized, suggest pictures of geological excavations. The solidity of the construction counterbalances the strangeness of the paint quality. It will be gathered from these remarks that many and varied paths open up for Pol Patoor's talent.



165.  
Luc PEIRE  
Free hand drawing XXX, 1963  
36 x 133, oil on panel.  
Private collection.



166.

Jozef PEETERS

Vignette, 1921, 3 x 3 (enlarged).

Appeared on first page of catalogue  
covering the Second Congress of Modern  
Art, Antwerp, January 1922.



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The Notices and Commentaries concerning  
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Van Lint, Verheyen, Verstockt, Vlerick, Welles and Wyckaert  
are write out by JAN WALRAVENS.





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Texts by R. van Gindertael and René Dupuis.

Brussels, 1952.

*Published by the group Art Abstrait* (album No. 2) :

Plates by Jan Burssens, Carrey, Delahaut, Forani, Ray Gilles, Holley, Kerels, Mels, Milo, Rabus, Rets, Jan Saverys.

Texts by René Massat, Maurits Bilcke, Sélim Sasson.

Brussels, 1953.

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Silk-screen printings by Delahaut, Holley, Lewy, Rets, Vandenbranden.

Texts by Bourgeois, De Maeyer, Dypréau and Sosset.

Brussels, 1956.

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Preamble by Maurits Bilcke.

Paris 1962.

*At the house of the author :*

X Silk-screen printings (1955-1957) by Jo Delahaut.

Texts by Seuphor and De Maeyer.

Brussels, 1959.



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